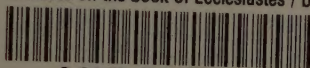


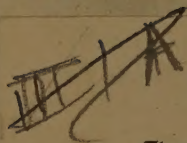
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ECCELESIASTES

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LECTURES
ON
THE BOOK OF
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By RALPH WARDLAW, D.D.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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THE HOUR OF

FOURTH ESTATE

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LECTURE XIII.

ECCLES. vii. 15—22.

15 “*All (things) have I seen in the days of my vanity :
there is a just (man) that perisheth in his righteousness,
and there is a wicked (man) that prolongeth (his life) in*
16 *his wickedness. Be not righteous overmuch ; neither
make thyself overwise : why shouldest thou destroy thy-*
17 *self ? Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish :*
18 *why shouldest thou die before thy time ? (It is) good
that thou shouldest take hold of this ; yea, also from this
withdraw not thine hand : for he that feareth God shall*
19 *come forth of them all. Wisdom strengtheneth the wise*
20 *more than ten mighty (men) who are in the city. For*
21 *(there is) not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and*
22 *sinneth not. Also take no heed unto all words that are
spoken ; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee : For*
*oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself
likewise hast cursed others.”*

“**BEHOLD,**” says the Psalmist, “thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee : verily every man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity.” All a man’s days on earth might therefore be with propriety denominated “the days of his vanity.” The designation, however, appears to be applied by Solomon

to that period of his life, during which he forsook God, and tried to find his happiness from worldly sources. The days of this period were indeed emphatically what he here denominates them.—In the course of these days, he had taken a very extensive survey of human life, and had marked with attention, in the spirit of a philosophical observer, the various circumstances which, in different situations, affected the happiness of mankind : —“ All things,” says he, in verse 15. “ have I seen in the days of my vanity.”

He specifies one of his observations, and founds upon it the counsel of wisdom : —“ There is a just (man) that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked (man) that longeth (his life) in his wickedness.”—The subject here, I apprehend, is not the conduct of Divine providence respecting the fortunes and lives of the righteous and the wicked; but rather the treatment which these two opposite descriptions of character frequently experience from the world: though this, no doubt, takes place under the superintendence, and by the permission, of Heaven. Solomon had noted various instances, in which the consistently righteous man, the man who by his conduct “ testifies against the world that its deeds are evil,” and especially one who, along with this character, holds a station of power and eminence, in which he feels his obligation to act conscientiously, without regard to fear or to favour, to flattery or to

threatening, exposed himself to the malignant operation of hatred and envy, by which his days had been at once embittered and cut short, through open violence or by secret treachery : whilst the wicked man had “prolonged his life in his wickedness,” acting on principles more congenial to the likings of the world in which he lived, and employing arts for his preservation such as the just man could not in conscience have recourse to ; so that sometimes he had even succeeded in lengthening out his days *by* his wickedness, whilst the good man had prematurely perished *for* his righteousness. From the days of “righteous Abel,” downward through the history of all nations, facts are not wanting in corroboration of Solomon’s statement. The whole army of martyrs, as well as many an ill-requited patriot, might be brought as witnesses to its truth.

With this general observation, what follows is to be considered as in immediate connection :—

Verses 16—18. “Be not righteous overmuch ; neither make thyself overwise ; why shouldst thou destroy thyself ? Be not overmuch wicked ; neither be thou foolish ; why shouldst thou die before thy time ? (It is) good that thou shouldst take hold of this ; yea, also from this withdraw not thy hand : for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.”

Persons who relish not nor study the word of God as a whole, have often particular parts of it which

they like; favourite texts, such as when severed from their connection, and regarded in their sound rather than their sense, appear to suit their preconceived opinions, and prevalent desires. These little insulated scraps of scripture, misunderstood and perverted, and applied to purposes the very opposite of the Divine intention, obtain a free currency amongst multitudes of people, many of whom perhaps never read them in their bibles, but have got them at second-hand as maxims of high authority; and they are quoted on all occasions, and referred to with the easy confidence of a geometrician quoting his axioms. In this, and in many other ways, the word of God meets with treatment, which would be resented as an insult by any human author; being made to express sentiments in perfect contrariety to its general spirit, and even to its most explicit declarations.

Few texts (perhaps I might say none) have ever been in such general favour, have ever been caught at, and circulated, and appealed to with approbation, by so great a variety of characters, as the first clause of the sixteenth verse,—“Be not righteous overmuch.”—Its grand recommendation lies in its being so *undefined*, susceptible of so many shades of meaning; prescribing no precise boundaries, but leaving matters conveniently at large, and thus affording latitude for every man to fix his own standard, (and even that may be very fluctuating), and

then to appeal to scripture against all who go beyond him, as exceeding reasonable bounds, and being “righteous overmuch.” For it is surprising how men, who hate and disregard the bible in its great truths and requirements, will yet quote its words, nay, even plead for its authority, when it can be made, by any perversion, to accord with their own inclinations.

The saying is a favourite one with the profligate, who, in cursing the enthusiasm and hypocrisy of others, vainly fancies that he is vindicating his own vice and folly; and who reckons it quite a sufficient reason for rejecting with scorn a serious and salutary advice, that it comes from one whom all must allow to be—“righteous overmuch.”

Often, on the other hand, is it appealed to by the man of morality, who, with stern severity, condemns the profligate, but who piques himself on his own sobriety, honesty, industry, kindness, and general decency of character; and, making this external virtue his religion, though without a single sentiment or emotion of inward godliness, considers every thing beyond it as being—“righteous overmuch.”

Many, who are equally destitute of the true spirit of religion, who feel its services an irksome drudgery, whose secret language in them all is, “What a weariness is it!” and who therefore satisfy their consciences with very flimsy apologies for the neglect of them, are ever ready to pronounce those

“righteous overmuch,” who cannot see their excuses in the same satisfactory light with themselves.

This admonition too is a weapon in constant use with the thousands, whose religion consists in the strict observance of its outward forms, in their appropriate times and places. They would not for the world be missed out of their pew on a Sunday, and with even greater reluctance on certain days of human institution. But they are clear for keeping religion to its proper place. This is a topic on which they continually insist; a species of *propriety* which, in company with a smile of self-complacency, is for ever on their lips. It is all well, if a man minds religion on its own appropriate day, and attends to his business the rest of the week. These things must not be made to clash. “Six days shalt thou labour, and one thou shalt rest,” are God’s own prescriptions:—and the bible itself enjoins us not to be—“righteous overmuch.”

But there are none to whom this favourite caution is of more essential service, than those professors of religion, of whom, alas! the number is not small, who, disliking “the offence of the cross,” are desirous to keep on good terms with both Christ and the world, and who cover from others, and try to cover from themselves, the real principle of their conduct, by prudential maxims of imposing plausibility, and some of them in the terms of scripture. The wisdom of the serpent, they say, is recommended to us, as well as the harmlessness of the

dove. They cannot see the use of exposing themselves and their religion to needless derision. They are ever mightily afraid, lest, by the over-strictness and uncomplying spirit of its professors, men should be led to form gloomy notions of the gospel, as a system of morose and puritanical austerity. "We must needs go out of the world," they allege, "if we are to take no part in its pleasures." Under the pretext of recommending religion, such persons meet the world half-way; they join in its follies and vain amusements; they rather court than shun its intercourse; and they sanction their unseemly compliances by an appeal to the admonition before us; regarding the reproach cast upon others, who think a more decided and marked separation from the world their duty, as brought upon themselves by their own imprudence,—by *carrying matters too far*,—by being "righteous overmuch."

A passage of scripture that has been so much abused, and of which the abuse is so extensively prejudicial, it is of great importance rightly to understand: and, before noticing any of the different views that have been taken of it, I shall state what to me appears to be its true meaning.

The whole passage seems to be an instance of serious and impressive IRONY: of which the subject is, the line of conduct most prudent to be pursued, supposing the end in view to be the securing of favour, honour, and prosperity in the world.—Thus:—"There is a just man that perisheth in

his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness." If, therefore, you wish to avoid the enmity of the world, with its mischievous and sometimes deadly consequences, and to ensure favour, success, honour, and long life,—“be not righteous overmuch:”—remember that religion is a matter, in which men, in general, are particularly fond of moderation; and beware of assuming an appearance of sanctity greater than the world is disposed to approve of, or to bear with. “Neither make thyself overwise; why shouldst thou destroy thyself?” Recollect, that the same feelings of envy and malignant jealousy may be excited, as they very often have been, by high degrees of superior intelligence and wisdom. Be not obtrusive, therefore, with your eminent endowments. Deal prudently. Be cautious of exasperating the jealous pride of others. Besides the risks that arise from envy, such qualities may bring you often into the critical situation of an arbitrator; in which you must unavoidably expose yourself to the resentment of one or other of the parties, and possibly even of both. And from various other sources, danger may arise to you.—But, at the same time, beware. Similar effects may be produced by opposite causes. Although men do not like overmuch religion, you must be on your guard, on the other hand, against the extreme of wickedness:—“Be not overmuch wicked.” You will expose yourself to suspicion and hatred, as a

dangerous member of society: men will become your enemies from fear, and will think they confer a benefit on the community, by making riddance of you: nay, in the excess of riotous and unbridled profligacy, you may be betrayed into deeds which may awaken the vengeance of human laws, and bring you to an untimely end. Let prudent consideration, then, set bounds to your licentiousness. —“Neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time?” As there are hazards attending high pretensions to wisdom, so are there risks peculiar to folly. The absolute fool becomes the object of contempt. His life is hardly thought worth an effort, far less a sacrifice, for its preservation. The fool is easily made the tool and the dupe of a party; exposing himself to be the prey of virulent enemies, or of selfish pretended friends. Folly leads a man into innumerable scrapes. It may induce him heedlessly to mix with wicked associates, and may thus, as indeed has many a time happened, occasion his suffering for crimes, in the perpetration of which he had no active hand, and which, fool as he is, he would shrink from committing. And in numberless ways he may come, by his folly, to “die before his time.”—If, therefore, I repeat, your object be to shun the world’s enmity, with its possible and probable effects, and to secure the world’s favour, with its desirable accompaniments and consequences, take care of these extremes:—as “there is a just (man) that perisheth in his righteousness,—be

not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself over-wise ; why shouldst thou destroy thyself?"—and though "a wicked (man)" may, and sometimes does, "prolong (his life) in his wickedness," yet "be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish ; why shouldst thou die before thy time?"

All scripture irony is serious, and intended to impress on the mind important lessons. The passage is, in this respect, similar to that striking one towards the close of the book : "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes :—**BUT KNOW THOU**, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."—So here, the admonition closes with an impressive recommendation of the fear of the Lord, as the best and only means of inspiring true peace and tranquil security of mind, as a sovereign antidote against the fear of man, and a powerful incentive to the faithful and firm discharge of duty in every situation :—Verse 18. " (It is) good that thou shouldst take hold of this ; yea, also from this withdraw not thy hand : for **HE THAT FEARETH GOD SHALL COME FORTH OF THEM ALL.**"

"It is good,"—supremely good and advantageous, "that thou shouldst lay hold on this,"—that is, on what I am now about to mention ; "yea, also from this withdraw not thy hand,"—that is, let this antidote against the perils of an evil world,

and against the fear of man, which so often brings a snare, be the subject of thy constant and attentive remembrance, the object of thy supreme and unceasing desire, and of thine unabating endeavours after its thorough attainment and its permanent influence ;—" for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all." Instead of adopting any of the maxims, or following any of the schemes, of a carnal policy and worldly wisdom, " be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long : " " Sanctify the Lord God in your heart ; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread : and He shall be for a sanctuary." He shall be thy fortress and strong tower ; so that thou shalt not need to be afraid of what man can do unto thee. " Thou shalt dwell on high ; and thy place of defence shall be the munition of rocks." " He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, (He is) my refuge and my fortress ; my God, in him will I trust. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust : his truth (shall be thy) shield and buckler."* " Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul : but rather fear him, who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing ? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear

* Psal. xci. 1, 2, 4.

ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”*

The nineteenth verse may be connected with this, as containing an amplification of the idea expressed in the latter part of it. “Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men who are in the city.” “Wisdom,”—that is, *this* wisdom, the fear of God, declared in other places to be wisdom, and the beginning of wisdom,—this wisdom “strengtheneth the wise:” it fortifies and invigorates the soul; it elevates it above every other fear; it inspires the heart with a firm feeling of security, and with resolute, undaunted courage in the path of duty, however beset with enemies and obstructed by difficulties. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.” “Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more,”—imparts to them more of inward confidence, and of real safety, “than ten mighty men,” ten experienced and skilful, powerful and intrepid leaders; or, understanding the number *ten* as a definite for an indefinite, more than any number of valiant warriors, “who are in the city,” can give to its inhabitants when invested by a besieging foe. Such a city may be deemed secure, when so defended: but the fear of God is a still stronger and surer defence to them who put their trust in his power and mercy.—Or, supposing the “ten mighty men who are in the city,” to be

* Matt. x. 28—31.

the foes of "him who fears God," wisdom makes him stronger than his enemies, gives him fortitude of mind against them, however numerous and however mighty. He that is with him is more than all that can be against him; so that he may say, with the Psalmist, "Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident:" "I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me: I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about." The felt security of those who are under the special protecting care of the Almighty, is finely represented by the case of the prophet Elisha, when surrounded in Dothan by the host of the king of Syria. When his servant, on rising in the morning, saw the city invested on all sides with horses and chariots, he said, with a fearful heart, "Alas! my master, how shall we do?" Elisha answered, "Fear not; for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them." And he prayed, and said, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw: and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." This host of the Lord was unseen but by the eye of faith. To the mind of the prophet it imparted the most fearless composure, under circumstances in which, to

the eye of sense, his destruction must have seemed inevitable.*

In vindication of the general principle which I have adopted for the explanation of this passage, let it now be observed, *in the first place* : The *motives* which Solomon employs to recommend and enforce his advice, evidently show, that in the fifteenth verse, when he speaks of “a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man prolonging his life in his wickedness,” he refers not directly to the conduct of providence, but to the consequences arising to the righteous and the wicked, from the feelings of mankind towards them : for, in the ordinary administration of God, the duration of human life does not appear to be at all regulated by the characters of men.

Secondly. If the counsel, “Be not righteous overmuch” means, that it is our duty to be righteous, but that we should beware of excess in righteousness ; then the opposite counsel, “Be not overmuch wicked,” if taken seriously, (that is, as having nothing in it of the nature of irony,) must, on the same principle of interpretation, be understood to signify, that we may be wicked, provided we take due care not to exceed, or to go beyond bounds in our wickedness. But this surely can never be the counsel of the word of God. Every reader of the bible will be instantly sensible how

* 2 Kings vi. 15—17.

much it is out of unison with the universal tenor of its sentiment and phraseology.

Thirdly. Righteousness, when opposed, as it is here, to *wickedness*, usually means, in scripture language, true religion in general, in all its various branches, of principle and of practice; the entire profession and course of conduct of a good man. In this enlarged sense I understand it here; and this makes me dissatisfied with other interpretations of the passage.

Some consider righteousness as referring particularly to the exercise of *justice*, and the admonition not to be righteous overmuch, as a caution against the over-rigid application of the principles of equity, pressing every thing to an extreme, never tempering justice with clemency, but exacting satisfaction and punishment, without mercy, on all occasions, even for the most trivial faults.—But if righteousness mean simply justice, then wickedness must mean simply injustice; and if “be not righteous overmuch” be a warning against the extreme of justice, “be not overmuch wicked” must be a warning against the extreme of injustice; a warning which we certainly should not expect to find in that book, which admits of no compromise between right and wrong, and whose sentence is, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.”^{1*}—Those who have adopted

* Luke xvi. 10.

the interpretation I am speaking of have not, I think, sufficiently attended to the *antithesis* in the passage; nor duly considered, that the true principle of interpretation, whatever it may be, ought to apply, with equal fairness and ease, to both sides of it. There is reason, indeed, to think, that the counsel “be not righteous overmuch” is quoted by multitudes without the most distant recollection, and by not a few without even the knowledge, of its being followed immediately by the admonition not to be “overmuch wicked.”

Others, understanding the terms “righteous” and “wicked,” as I think they ought to be understood, in their more general acceptation, and at the same time conceiving “Be not righteous overmuch” to be Solomon’s serious counsel, cannot, however, deny, that of true righteousness, of real religion, of genuine unsophisticated goodness, there cannot be excess. They are, therefore, under the necessity of qualifying and restricting after all.—Some of them explain the words as a caution against *intemperate zeal*, exerting itself indiscreetly, contentiously, and to the injury of religion:—some, as a warning against *a blind and bigotted superstition*, displaying itself in an excessive attachment to rites and ceremonies of human invention, or even, it may be, to external institutions of Divine appointment, whilst the spirit of vital godliness is entirely or in a great measure overlooked:—others as an admonition against a *needless scrupulosity*

about trifles ; a want of proper discrimination between smaller and greater matters, between what have been termed essentials and non-essentials ; from which have arisen the hottest contentions, and numberless unnecessary schisms.

Of all these, and other interpretations of a similar kind that might be noticed, it may be observed in general :—First, that these things are not properly righteousness ; but the mere adjuncts, and unjustifiable accompaniments or counterfeits of righteousness : and secondly, that if such things are meant in the exhortation, “ Be not righteous overmuch,” it will follow, that what is said, in the verse preceding, of “ the righteous man perishing in his righteousness,” must be considered as expressing, not the consequence of his real godliness itself, but of his imprudent profession and practice, or his needlessly ostentatious display, of it. But this certainly is not what Solomon means, when he contrasts the “ righteous perishing in his righteousness,” with the “ wicked prolonging his life in his wickedness.”

Considering righteousness, then, in its proper sense, in the sense in which it is generally used in the bible, I must repeat what has before been hinted, that no man who is conversant in the contents of that blessed volume, can for a moment admit the idea of its containing a caution against the excess of it ;—the excess of true religion and moral obedience. Were such excess possible, surely

it is not the side on which we are in danger of erring, and require to be seriously admonished. — Shall we warn him against too much spirituality of mind, who feels himself by nature “carnal, sold under sin,” and in whose bosom the “law of sin” is incessantly striving against the “law of his mind?” Shall we put him on his guard against allowing the love of God, the comprehensive principle of all righteousness, to occupy too much of his heart, whose nature is enmity against him? Shall we caution against looking too constantly at the things which are unseen and eternal, a creature whose propensities are so powerful to seek his portion in the things that are seen and temporal; who feels his affections drawn downward, and bound to the earth? How preposterous the thought, of warning a sinful creature against the excess of holiness! a selfish creature against the excess of benevolence and integrity! an earthly-minded creature against too intimate fellowship with heaven! a creature surrounded with temptations to equivocate between God and the world, and who carries about within him principles of the old man, to which, alas! these temptations are too congenial, against a profession and conduct too decided on the part of God and of godliness! a creature who is so much in danger of seeking glory from men, against estimating too highly or coveting too eagerly, the honour that cometh from God only! a creature, in a word, that has so many sadly prevailing tendencies to the

entire dereliction of righteousness, against being “righteous overmuch!”

Lastly. The whole of the language of the Divine word, in describing the character at which God’s people ought continually to aim, is fitted to impress on every mind the *impossibility* of the dreaded excess,—of being “righteous overmuch.” Let a few passages suffice as a specimen of many.—“If any man (be) in Christ; (he is) a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.” “Whosoever hath this hope in him,” (in Christ; namely, the hope of seeing him as he is and being like him,) “purifieth himself even as he is pure.” “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but (this) one thing (I do): forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.” “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, (which is) your reasonable service: and be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what (is) the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.” “Love not the world, neither the things (that are) in the world; for if any man love the

world, the love of the Father is not in him." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "The friendship of the world is enmity with God: whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." "Giving all diligence, add to your faith, fortitude; and to fortitude, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity." "For none of us liveth to himself, and none of us dieth to himself: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."*—These passages, which are only an exemplification of the current phraseology of the bible on the subject of Christian holiness, express a spirituality, a decision and self-denial, a universality, perseverance, and progress, of practical obedience, utterly inconsistent with any cautions against the danger of excess, and admonitions to moderation. Of such sedatives, alas! we stand not in need. All the exciting stimulants that can be applied to our minds, are few enough, and weak enough, to keep us on the alert against the temptations of the world,

* 2 Cor. v. 17. 1 John iii. 3. Phil. iii. 13, 14. Col. iii. 2. Rom. xii. 1, 2. Gal. v. 24. 1 John ii. 15. Matt. vi. 24. James iv. 4. 2 Cor. vii. 1. 2 Pet. i. 5—7. Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

and alive to the great ends of our being. The sinless perfection of our moral nature, is the object of commanded pursuit and of promised attainment. We can never, even in a future world, go beyond this; and in the present world, bearing about with us to the end the corruption of the old man, we can never reach it. We can never exceed the requirements of the precepts I have been repeating. To be “righteous overmuch,” is an impossibility.

The statement in the twentieth verse,—“for (there is) not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not,” is made without exception or qualification; and ought for ever to lay in the dust the lofty pretensions of some professing Christians, as if they had attained to a state of perfect freedom from inward and outward sin; a pretension pregnant with the most astonishing self-ignorance, or the most presumptuous spiritual pride. There are “*just* men upon the earth:” they “do good,” and manifest by its fruits the nature and qualities of the tree. But there are no *perfect* men upon the earth; none who can say, without the most pitiable self-deception, “I have no sin.” There is many a one that “doeth good;” but no one that “doeth good and sinneth not;”—no, not one. Not only are we guilty of many sins along with our good deeds; but in our good deeds themselves there is sin. “There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and,” even in the good that he doeth, “sinneth not.” We have all of us abundant reason

to say, not only that “in many things we offend,” but that in every thing we “fail and come short;” and still to come to God with the prayer of the publican, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”

But the connection of the verse with what precedes is not, at first view, very obvious: and accordingly different translations have been proposed of the connective particle, rendered by our translators “*For* ;” some joining it with what goes before, and others with what follows. There seems no need for any alteration. The verse connects in a natural and edifying manner with the sentiment of the eighteenth and nineteenth verses: “(It is) good that thou shouldst lay hold on this; yea, also from this withdraw not thy hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. Wisdom”—this wisdom, the fear of God,—“strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty (men) who are in the city.” The admonition to cultivate the fear of God is then enforced by the appropriate consideration, “For (there is) not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” You are a sinful and imperfect creature; having the seeds of all evil within you; ever liable to feel the power of temptation, and to fall before it. Cherish, therefore, the fear of God, as the great preventive of evil; the strengthening and sustaining principle amidst abounding intimidations and allurements; that which alone can counteract the propensities of corruption. One temptation to sin, a frequent and a strong one, is

the fear of man. But the predominant fear of God raises the mind above it; gives vigour of heart, boldness of countenance, and energy of resistance; and, maintained in exercise by the Spirit of God, secures the final victory.

Verses 21st and 22d contain some further necessary advice, for the preservation of our peace and happiness in life:—"Also, take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee. For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth, that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others."

The precept requires *practice* more than it needs *illustration*. Its general nature is sufficiently plain. It is addressed to those who are apt to be jealous of what is thought and what is said about them by others; who are continually on the tiptoe of listening suspicion. It has been said, and is almost proverbial, that listeners seldom hear good of themselves. It is quite natural to expect that it should be so. The very practice shows the man's conscience to be inwardly whispering to himself, that it is not good he is entitled to hear. The anxious curiosity indicates the existence of such a secret suspicion; and he who indulges it, well deserves the mortification he receives.—If we regard our own happiness, we shall pay attention to this admonition. The feeling must be one of exquisite distress, when a man, expecting commendation and blessing, hears from the lips that should have

uttered it, reviling and malediction. In such a case, surely, "ignorance is bliss." It may often happen, that a person, under the irritation of temporary passion, may utter hastily the severe reflection, and the imprecation of evil, to which he would by no means stand in his cooler moments. What he has hastily uttered he quickly forgets. But he who is the subject of it cannot so readily banish it from his mind; he cannot, from his self-partiality, make adequate allowance for the momentary passion that has produced it; he broods over it; it leaves a deep and rankling wound; and he thus makes himself lastingly unhappy, by hearing what he who said it has not lodged in his bosom for a single hour.—We should, besides, be influenced to receive this admonition by the consideration suggested in the twenty-second verse: "For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others." You not only are aware, my fellow-christians, how you were wont to feel and to speak, when you were destitute of the grace of God; but you are conscious to yourselves how you are apt to be affected still: how ready you are, in the moment of irritation, to kindle with resentful emotion, and to utter the wish of evil; nay, how much you are in danger of even retaining and cherishing the spirit of malediction. Sensible of this, you will "beware of giving heed unto all words that are spoken." Your own consciousness will prevent you from

thinking it impossible that you should hear any evil of yourselves; and it will, at the same time, teach you, to make allowance for the passions and the hasty speeches of other men.

From this passage, I may, *in the first place*, address to my fellow-christians, the words of the apostle John, “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.” No strange thing happens to you. It has been so, as the apostle, in the connection of the words quoted, reminds his brethren, from the very beginning; from the time when God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.” “Cain was of that wicked one, and slew his brother: and wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.”—The same principles of enmity against God, and his spiritual children, continued to operate in the days of Solomon; who saw “the just (man) perishing in his righteousness, and the wicked (man) prolonging his life in his wickedness.”—And never was the hostility of human nature to God and goodness more affectingly displayed, than at the fulness of time, during the personal ministry of the Son of God; when the Eternal Word, made flesh, dwelt amongst men, “full of grace and truth.” He was hated by the world, because, by the perfection of his example, and the faithfulness of his ministry, he “testified of it that its deeds were

evil." And most emphatically might it be said of him, that he "perished in his righteousness."—His apostles after him experienced the same effects from the same cause, agreeably to his own faithful premonition: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before (it hated) you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but, because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." And the case is still unaltered. The enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman still subsists. Various circumstances in providence, indeed, prevent it (and for this we have cause to be thankful,) from operating in the way of public persecution of the Christian name. But still it exists, and still it shows itself, in an endless variety of more private ways, wherever the decidedly serious and spiritual religion of the gospel is exhibited. Unregenerated human nature likes not God and holiness one whit better now than it has ever done. The pure and lowly Saviour is still, and often even in the midst of professed and nominal attachment to him, "despised and rejected of men:" and the tendency of the cordial acceptance, and the humble and spiritual profession of his doctrine, still is, to separate a man from his brethren;

to divide households, two against three, and three against two; and, by its collision with the corrupt passions of the heart in those who continue strangers to its saving power, to strike out the sparks, and kindle the fire, of persecution and strife. Where-soever, and to what extent soever, the spirit of hostility displays itself, let the sufferers remember, both for their encouragement and their admonition, the words of their Master: “Blessed (are) they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed (are) ye when (men) shall revile you, and persecute (you), and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great (is) your reward in heaven.” O remember, my brethren, it must be “for righteousness’ sake” that you suffer,—it must be “falsely” that you are evil spoken of, else the blessing cannot be yours. “But if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy (are ye): and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and (be) ready always to (give) an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”*

Secondly. Let men beware of wresting and abusing the scriptures, to their own delusion and ruin.—It is a very sure evidence of a man’s not being decidedly righteous at all, when he is particularly fond of the caution (misinterpreted, as in

* Matt. v. 10—12. 1 Pet. iii. 14, 15.

that case we are certain it must be) “not to be righteous overmuch:”—a caution, which is often repeated, with a sneer of malicious satisfaction, by men in whose eyes all real, heartfelt, spiritual religion, all scriptural godliness, is held as enthusiasm and madness;—that religion, I mean, which mourns for sin in deep self-abasement; which loves the Saviour supremely; which is addicted to reading the bible, to prayer and communion with God; which counts the sabbath a delight; which shrinks, with a delicate tenderness of conscience, from even the appearance of evil; which ceases to have pleasure in the empty vanities, the time-and-soul-killing follies, of a passing world, and weeps in pity for those who have; which seeks to enjoy God in all things, and all things in God.

My friends, the subject is serious,—deeply serious; worthy of being in earnest about. Either you must belong to the people of God, or to the world: and the time is coming when this distinction shall be announced with awful solemnity, and shall be fixed, with its consequences on either side, in eternal permanence.

With easy lightness of heart, and scornful rejection of serious counsel from those who feel the weight of religious truth and the sacredness of religious duty, you talk of “not being righteous overmuch;” and you thus cloak under a bible phrase your deplorable regardlessness of the bible’s most important discoveries and most imperative

obligations. You spurn its pure and elevated sanctities away from you, and, with infatuated thoughtlessness, allege its own authority for doing so. But you do not read your bible, else you never would talk thus. O my friends do bethink yourselves. A sinful creature “righteous overmuch!”—a sinner too good! Can you, in your consciences, believe, that the word of God seriously warns you against the danger of this? If not, O beware of perverting a Divine counsel;—beware of doing with the word of the Eternal God what you would resent as an insult were it done with your own.

“(There is) not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.” There is not therefore a just man upon earth, that can stand accepted before God on the ground of his own righteousness. Such is the character of that Being with whom we have to do, and such the requirements of his perfect law, that nothing but a sinless righteousness can procure acceptance at his bar. Such a righteousness is not to be found in fallen man. And the very first, and a most distinctive feature, in the character of the renewed, is the entire renunciation of all dependence on their own doings, and a simple-hearted reliance on the perfect righteousness,—the obedience, atonement, and intercession, of the Son of God. All of them are ready to say, with deep prostration of soul before God, “If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O

Lord, who shall stand?" "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified:" "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Forget not, at the same time, that personal righteousness, "walking in newness of life" is the only unequivocal evidence of interest, by faith, in the righteousness of the Redeemer. Therefore,

Thirdly. Let Christians implore, with earnestness and constancy, the influences of the Spirit of God, at once to deepen their sense of sinfulness, and at the same time to maintain in full vigour in their souls the "fear of God;" that by this wisdom they may be brought through all temptation, may "come forth," victorious, from all opposition, and untainted, from all the corrupting influence of an evil world:—that they may manifest in increasing holiness the increasing power of this sacred principle:—that they may not be "led away by the error of the wicked, and so fall from their own steadfastness, but may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Let it be their constant desire and aim, to be *righteous more and more*; never thinking that they have already attained, or that they are already perfect." Let them "follow holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." "Of *this*" let them "take hold;" "from *this* let them not withdraw their hand." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God

that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” “Gird up the loins of your minds, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that shall be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance; but, as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning (here) in fear: forasmuch as ye know, that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, (as) silver and gold, from your vain conversation (received) by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you; who by him do believe in God, who raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God.”*

Lastly. Let a sense of our own liableness and proneness to err, in heart, in word, and in conduct, render us charitable, candid, and gentle, in our judgments of others. The *principle* of the admonition, “Take no heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee; for oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth, that

* 1 Pet. i. 14—21.

thou thyself likewise hast cursed others," may be thus, with propriety, generalized. We ought not to expect too much from others, when we are conscious to ourselves of our own weakness, and sinfulness: and we should especially beware of harshness, and of severely condemning others for things of which we ourselves are guilty. "Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things."* "Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the beam that (is) in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and behold, a beam is in thine own eye. Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote out of thy brother's eye."†

* Rom. ii. 1.

† Matt. vii. 1—5.

LECTURE XIV.

ECCLES. vii. 23—29.

23 “ *All this have I proved by wisdom : I said, I will be*
24 *wise ; but it (was) far from me. That which is far off,*
25 *and exceeding deep, who can find it out ? I applied*
mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wis-
dom, and the reason (of things), and to know the wicked-
26 *ness of folly, even of foolishness (and) madness : and I*
find more bitter than death the woman whose heart (is)
snare and nets, (and) her hands (as) bands : whoso
pleaseth God shall escape from her ; but the sinner shall
27 *be taken by her. Behold, this have I found, [saith the*
Preacher,] (counting) one by one, to find out the account ;
28 *Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not : one man*
among a thousand have I found ; but a woman among all
29 *those have I not found. Lo, this only have I found,*
that God hath made man upright ; but they have sought
out many inventions.

THE wisdom which God imparted to Solomon did not consist in the supernatural infusion of knowledge, on all subjects, into his mind ; but rather in an understanding rendered by “ the Father of the spirits of all flesh ” unusually acute and comprehensive, capable of quick discernment, clear and

accurate conception, enlarged views, and thus of extensive and multifarious acquisitions. And it was in the diligent exercise of his mental faculties, thus strengthened, elevated, and amplified, that he gained that extent and variety of knowledge and wisdom, for which he was so highly and justly celebrated.

The serious and important lessons contained in this book, are the result of the wisdom given him, when rightly exercised, under the influence of the fear of the Lord, and the superintending direction of the Holy Spirit, by whom he was prompted to record his experience.—“All this,” says he, in the first of the verses I have now read,—“All this have I proved by wisdom:”—I have tried all these diversified sources of happiness, and have proved the result to be such as I have stated:—I have proved the lessons I now deliver to be founded in truth, to be “good and profitable unto men.” Not that it was a wise course by which he collected his experience: but he had now, through Divine mercy, been led to apply to that experience, the wisdom given him, and to teach to others the lessons it had taught to himself.

Even to the course, indeed, which procured him his experience, he had been incited by the misdirected desire of wisdom, or knowledge. This was his ruling passion; a principle, good in itself, but in its application susceptible of the most grievous perversion.—“I said, I will be wise.” On

this object he set his heart, and he pursued it, with unabating ardour, in every direction,—in all descriptions of experiment and research.—“But,” he adds, “it was far from me.”

1. The measure of wisdom which he was desirous to attain, in his different pursuits, was far from him. He still found, after all his investigation, that he “knew but in part;” and the more he came to know, the more did he perceive the vast extent of what yet remained undiscovered; of subjects hid in darkness, or dimly seen in the twilight of conjecture. In the rich mine of science, he was for ever striking on some new vein; and in the very ardour and enthusiasm of discovery, arriving at points, beyond which no mortal skill or power was able to penetrate. Thus even Solomon, with all his marvellous faculties, experienced the truth of what the poet says of knowledge,

“’Tis but to know—how little can be known.”

There are limits to the powers of the mightiest minds. There are many things in the nature of the Divine Being, many things in his works, and many things in his ways, that are “past finding out;” things, of which the loftiest and most capacious understandings must be content to say, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain unto it:”—or, as Solomon adds, in the following verse, “That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?”

2. If we consider him as speaking of the exercise of his understanding during “the days of his vanity,” which is probably the case, how affecting is the representation of his pursuits!—“I said I will be wise:” and to fulfil his resolution, he set himself to the study of all the branches of human knowledge. But all the while, wisdom, *true* wisdom, “was far from him.” Having departed from the “fear of God,” true wisdom was nowhere else to be found: a search through the universe could not have discovered it. All would still have been unsatisfying, all folly, without this; wisdom and true happiness alike far from him.—“Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The deep saith, It (is) not in me, and the sea saith, (It is) not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed (for) the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it (shall not be for) jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of pearl or of corals; for the price of wisdom (is) above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. Whence, then, cometh wisdom? and where (is) the place of understanding? Destruction and Death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. GOD

understandeth the way thereof; and HE knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, (and) seeth under the whole heaven; to make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. And unto man he said, BEHOLD, THE FEAR OF THE LORD, THAT (IS) WISDOM; AND TO DEPART FROM EVIL (IS) UNDERSTANDING.”*—Having forgotten the concluding declaration of this beautiful and sublime passage, Solomon necessarily missed, in every other quarter in which he sought it, the precious object of his desire.

The words in the beginning of the 25th verse express the indefatigable ardour with which his end was pursued:—“I applied my heart, to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason (of things).” The various terms employed, between which it is quite unnecessary to attempt fixing the precise shades of difference, are evidently accumulated, to convey strongly to the mind the impression of eager, intense, and unwearied assiduity of application; persevering in spite of all difficulties and discouragements.

He sought to know “wisdom, and the reason (of things).” He was not satisfied with the knowledge of mere facts. He investigated principles.

* Job xxviii. 12—28.

He tried to discover causes ; both in nature and in providence ; and in the moral and physical departments of each. And in his study of mankind, he examined the reasons of their state, their conduct, and their prospects ; and explored the various sources of their happiness and their misery.

One of the subjects of his attention and inquiry was, “ the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness (and) madness ;” that is, the foolishness and madness of men, who live “ without God in the world,” who “ walk in the sight of their eyes, and in the imagination of their heart.”—In one view, this was a very proper and a highly profitable subject of investigation. We can hardly be better employed than in considering, and seriously weighing, the “ exceeding sinfulness” of sin ; and the more closely we examine it, in the various lights in which it ought to be contemplated,—as committed against the Sovereign of the universe, infinitely holy and infinitely good, and as tending to bring dishonour upon his blessed name, to unsettle the foundations of his eternal throne, and to spread confusion, misery, and ruin through all his dominions ; we shall find it to be unsearchable,—“ exceeding deep, so that none can find it out.” This is the case, as to the intrinsic evil and demerit of sin. Its malignity cannot be estimated by a fallen creature, whose judgment is perverted by its sadly prevailing power. Although not, in the strict acceptation of terms, an infinite evil, (for,

since in infinitude there are no degrees, this would equalize the guilt of all transgression,) yet, as committed against an infinite Being, not even a holy creature (because necessarily finite, though free from the bias of corruption,) can form any adequate conception of the measure of its guilt. God alone thoroughly knows it. He beholds it in its true undisguised nature; in all the extent of its inherent deformity. He views it in the light of his own spotless purity and incomprehensible majesty; and in all its bearings and tendencies, were it allowed its unrestrained operation, both in reference to his own glory, and to the happiness of creation. The estimate which he has formed of it, we learn from the declarations of his word; and especially from the sacrifice required for its expiation,—from the deeply mysterious and awful scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary.—And as the intrinsic evil of sin is beyond our comprehension, so is the depth of human depravity, the “fulness of evil” that is in the heart of man. “The heart (is) deceitful above all (things), and desperately wicked; who can know it? I the Lord search the hearts; (I) try the reins; to give every man according to his ways, (and) according to the fruit of his doings.”*—Thus God

“—— hides from every being but himself
That hideous sight,—a naked human heart.”

* Jer. xvii. 9, 10.

Good had it been for the king of Israel, had he contemplated "the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness," to deepen his humility, to aggravate his horror of sin, to soften his pity for the wretched subjects of this moral mania, and to render him more closely vigilant and jealous of himself, from a consciousness of the enormous sum of hidden evil in his own heart!—There are some things, which it is much better for us not to know at all, than to learn by experience. But Solomon, instead of satisfying himself with examining "the wickedness of folly" by his observation of others; by their recorded warnings and dying regrets, by inward reflection, by the contemplation of God, by meditation on the testimony of his word; must needs subject it to personal experiment: he must try "foolishness and madness" as a source of enjoyment: he must join the company of fools, partake of their follies, and know for himself. Infatuated prince! He reaped the fruit of his doings. Good things abused are proverbially the worst. The wisdom bestowed on Solomon, rightly employed, was his own happiness and honour, and the blessing of his people and of mankind. But perverted and prostituted, it led him fearfully astray. It brought him within the eddies of a perilous whirlpool, and exposed him to the hazard of eternal destruction. His soul, indeed, was, through sovereign mercy, restored. But, oh! the

bitterness and “vexation of spirit” which his sinful presumption cost him !

The bitterest, yet the most dangerous and intoxicating ingredient in the cup of folly,—bitter in the end, though sweet in the enjoyment,—Solomon mentions in the twenty-sixth verse, in terms that indicate how his heart recoiled from the recollection.

“ And I find more bitter than death, the woman whose heart (is) snares and nets, (and) her hands (as) bands : whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her ; but the sinner shall be taken by her.”

In the preceding verse he speaks of his having “applied his heart, to know the wickedness of folly.” The particular sin to which he refers in the 26th verse, is frequently in the scriptures termed *folly*, and those who committed it, especially under certain circumstances, were said to have “wrought folly in Israel.”—“I find more bitter than death,”—that is, in the issue, in the worse than deadly tendency of her tempting blandishments,—worse than deadly, because endangering not the body merely, but the immortal soul, not the interests of time merely, but of eternity, leaving nothing behind them, but the bitterness of remorse, and the “fearful looking for of judgment.”—“I find more bitter than death, the woman whose heart (is) snares and nets, (and) her hands (as) bands.” This is the “strange woman,” whom he so often mentions in the book of Proverbs, depicting her character, describing her ways, and warning against the perils

of her company.—How strong the expression,—“whose heart (is) snares and nets!” signifying the multitude of her devices of temptation, and the consummate skill, the secrecy, the address, the guile, with which she uses them, for the accomplishment of her purposes. Her very “heart (is) snares and nets,” in whose intricate and entangling meshes, the fascinated and deluded soul is taken captive to its destruction.—“(And) her hands (as) bands.” Her powers of detention are equal to her powers of allurements. Her heart is a net, to ensnare the unwary; her hands are as bands, to hold him fast when her wiles have proved successful. So irresistible is the power, operating like the spell of enchantment, by which she retains under her influence the hapless victim of her charms.—Delicate as the subject is, faithfulness demands that we speak plainly; especially for the warning of thoughtless youth. There is no sin more sadly prevalent; none that has enticed more to their ruin than this. “Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart.” It was this sin, that robbed Reuben of his birthright, and wrung his father’s heart with shame and anguish:—it is a foul blot in the life of Judah:—it unsheathed the sword of perfidy and vengeance against the guiltless Shechemites:—it spoiled Samson of his eyes, his strength, his liberty, his life, and endangered the freedom of his country:—it cost David many a pang of penitential agony, many a secret groan, many a bitter tear:—

and it had well nigh proved the ruin of his son and successor in the throne; whose “soul escaped, as a bird out of the snare of the fowler,” narrowly escaped, and with serious damage. A hard and narrow escape, indeed, in every case it is. It is a sin that has slain, and, alas! continues to slay, its thousands and tens of thousands.

“Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.”—“Whoso *pleaseth God*,” is, in the original language, the same phrase as “the man that is *good before God*,” in the twenty-sixth verse of the second chapter.—The expressions used here strongly intimate, that, from the greatness, the imminent greatness of the danger, final escape is to be considered as a remarkable interposition of heaven, a signal instance of peculiar Divine regard. The man that is “good before God,” may, alas! as mournful experience has too often shown, fall before this temptation. And if, after falling, and yielding himself for a time to guilty indulgence, he is recovered to repentance and purity, he may be looked upon as rescued from extreme peril,—as “a brand plucked out of the fire;” obtaining a deliverance, which nothing but the grace of God could effect for him.—“But the sinner,”—the obstinate sinner, whose character is thoroughly vicious, who has no “good thing in him towards the Lord God of Israel,” who has run on in his course of sin and profligacy, till he has been “given over to a reprobate mind,” and is the guilty

victim of Divine displeasure and vengeance,—*he* “shall be taken by her;”—yes,—and he shall be held by her;—and he shall be ruined by her. “Led captive by her at her will,” he shall find at last that “her steps take hold on hell;” that her syren smiles have cursed him with the frown of an angry God; that her soft and silken cords have only drawn him down

“To adamantine chains and penal fire.”

“Hearken unto me now, therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thy heart decline to her ways; go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded; yea many strong (men) have been slain by her. Her house (is) the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.”*

Solomon’s own deliverance was wonderful; for no one could go further astray, or give himself up more completely to the gratification of irregular desires, than he. “King Solomon,” says the inspired historian of his reign, “loved many strange women, (together with the daughter of Pharaoh,) women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, (and) Hittites; of the nations (concerning) which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in unto them, neither shall they come in unto you; (for) surely they will turn away

* Prov. vii. 24—27. See the whole chapter, and also Prov. v. 3—14. xxii. 14.

your hearts after their gods. Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.”* And then follows a particular account of the lengths to which he went in complying with the “abominable idolatries” of these unworthy objects of his wandering and wanton affections. “And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared unto him twice; and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the Lord commanded.”

To these melancholy circumstances in the life of this prince there is an obvious allusion in the following verses; on which account it is, that I have here introduced them anew:—

Verses 27, 28. “Behold, this have I found, saith the Preacher, (counting) one by one to find out the account; which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.”

“Counting one by one to find out the account,” is by some rendered, “weighing one thing after another to find out the reason.” Our own translation, however, seems preferable. For as to the *reason* of what he states, we can hardly imagine, that the wisdom of the wisest of men, after it was set free from fascination, and allowed to judge

* 1 Kings xi. 1—3.

without bias, could for a moment be at a loss to discover, or hesitate to pronounce upon it. What he means to tell us, then, is, that he was careful and minute in the observations from which he drew his account. He considered amongst his courtiers, and amongst his wives and concubines, to find out the number of the faithful, the truly good, the virtuous, the godly. And the judgment which he formed from this inspection had undergone no change, from recollection, at the time he was writing: for this is probably the meaning of the words, “which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not.”—“One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.”

“One man among a thousand!” a very small proportion, alas! and presenting a sad picture of the degenerate state of Solomon’s court at the period referred to. He was not then imitating the determination of his pious father:—“I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; (it) shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me; I will not know a wicked (person). Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath a high look and a proud heart will I not suffer. Mine eyes (shall be) on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh

deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.”*

But small as this proportion is, it is greater than was to be found amongst the *women* of the royal household:—“a woman among all those have I not found.”—Are we to consider this as expressive of Solomon’s general opinion, that the number of good women is inferior to the number of good men?—Were we so to interpret his words, they would convey a judgment contrary, as I am satisfied, to truth; and, at the same time, unwarranted by the particular case on which it is founded. The reason of Solomon’s want of success in his search for a virtuous woman, it is not surely difficult to discover. He sought for good, where, from the nature of the thing, nothing but evil was reasonably to be expected. Who, that is in quest of virtue, and purity, and general excellence of female character, would seek it in the crowded seraglio of an eastern prince?

In multiplying to himself wives and concubines, Solomon had gone far astray from the original law of marriage, announced “in the beginning,” when God made “a male and a female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.” He had also doubly violated the express command of God, who had not only charged the Israelites in general, that they should not make marriages with the surrounding nations, because

* Psal. ci. 5—7.

they would thus be turned away from following Jehovah, to serve other gods;* but had also, in anticipating their future desire of a king over them, in describing his character, and specifying his duties, most explicitly enjoined,—“Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away.”† In the transgression of these prohibitory precepts, Solomon had greatly exceeded any of his predecessors in the throne of Israel.

In such a situation, when, instead of concentrating his affections on one wife, as the partner of his joys and sorrows, and seeking domestic happiness in her faithful and undivided love, he gathered around him, for magnificence and for lawless indulgence, so large a multitude, with all their varieties of corporeal and mental qualities, and necessarily placed himself in the very midst of heartless blandishments, of envies and jealousies, of contending interests and selfish quarrels, how could he ever hope for *happiness*?—and in such a situation, when he had surrounded himself with idolatrous heathens, or with such Hebrew women as chose to be their voluntary associates in ministering to his voluptuousness, how could he ever look for *virtue*?—A virtuous woman would not connect herself with such a group; or if, by the prospect of magnificence and plenty, any one, whose principles were in the main good, had been tempted to join herself to his court, her character was not very likely, in

* Deut. vii. 2—4.

† Deut. xvii. 17.

such company, to remain long free from the general corruption.—Of all possible ways, he certainly adopted the least promising, for finding a virtuous woman. He had himself, and no other, to blame. If, indeed, he had satirized the sex, because amongst *such* a thousand he had not discovered one woman of sound principle, he satirized it on most unjust, unwise, and unmanly grounds.

But I am far from thinking that he here speaks the language of a disappointed and waspish satirist. He rather utters the feelings of an abased and self-dissatisfied penitent; of one who had felt it to be “an evil thing and a bitter,” to depart, as he had done, from God; who “remembered the wormwood and the gall;” who perceived and lamented the folly and the wickedness of all those “inventions,” by which himself and others had sought to find happiness apart from the favour and the ways of God. He justifies God, and condemns himself:—

Verse 29. “Lo! this only have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.”—Here is “the conclusion of the whole matter:” “Of the things which he had spoken this is the sum.”

“God made man upright.”—When the progenitors of our race came from the forming hand of their Creator, they were the subjects of perfect intellectual and moral rectitude. There was no distortion in the understanding, no obliquity in the will, no corruption in the affections. There was

perfect truth in the mind, perfect purity in the heart, and perfect practical holiness in the life. They were made "in the image, and after the likeness" of God himself; which, according to the apostle, consisted especially in "righteousness and true holiness," connected with, and arising out of, "knowledge."—Otherwise than thus, man could not be made by a pure, and holy, and benevolent Being. To suppose the contrary, is to make God, in the strictest sense, in a sense of which it is impious to admit the imagination, the Author of sin. The subject, indeed, is enveloped in difficulties, of which that man has not properly thought who does not feel their magnitude. Into the discussion of these, it were unseasonable to enter. I can only remark in general, that the matter of fact, of the actual existence of moral evil, is too notorious to admit of a moment's question:—that the bible account of its origin did not cause it; it existed independently of the revelation which informs us how it began; and the rejection of that revelation neither removes nor mitigates it, nor disencumbers it, in the slightest degree, of its embarrassing difficulties:—that, on the contrary, revelation alone, whilst it assumes and proceeds upon the mournful fact, provides a remedy; all other systems, finding human nature in ruins, leave it as they find it; Revelation rears out of the ruins a magnificent and holy Temple to the God of purity and love.—That evil exists, then, is an indisputable fact:—that God could not be

its Author, is a proposition, which, to all who entertain right notions of his character, will be equally indisputable:—"God made man upright." Of all that followed, although happening "according to his determinate counsel and foreknowledge," the guilt and responsibility must necessarily lie with man himself. This is the statement here; and it is a statement to the truth of which we *must* assent, in despite of any puzzling questions to which the subject has given rise:—"God made man upright: but they"—that is, men—"have sought out many inventions."

The uprightness in which man was created was the great source of his original happiness. He was perfectly happy, because he was perfectly free from that which is the cause of all misery,—of all external and internal suffering. Resembling his Creator in holiness, he resembled him in felicity.—But, alas! through the influence of temptation, man became dissatisfied with the situation in which his all-bountiful Lord had placed him, and with the measure of knowledge and enjoyment (abundant as it was) with which he had graciously blessed him:—and the origin and the pattern of all the subsequent "inventions," by which men have endeavoured to find happiness, was, an attempt to obtain an augmentation of it from what Jehovah had interdicted. "The serpent said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the

trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which (is) in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know, that, in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree (was) good for food, and that it (was) pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make (one) wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat.”*—Such was the first of human “inventions” for the attainment of a fancied happiness. We know too well the result. It “brought death into the world, and all our wo.” The flattering promise of the tempter, who “is a liar, and the father of lies,” proved a cursed and cursing delusion; aggravating his own condemnation, and gratifying his malignity in damning others.—Many have been the inventions since. But they have all partaken of the falsehood and deceitfulness, the folly and impiety, of the first. They have been “of the earth, earthly,”—“from beneath, and not from above.” They have left GOD out of the account; and how could they prove otherwise than illusory?—wretched proofs of the senselessness and depravity of the inventors?—“wells without water,” from which all who travel to them “return with

* Gen. iii. 1—6.

their vessels empty; ashamed and confounded, and covering their heads."

Solomon includes himself, and himself chiefly, in the sentence of condemnation. He had tried many of these inventions. He had followed the crooked ways of human folly and corruption, in his search after the supreme good, during "the days of his vanity:" and having felt in himself, and having witnessed in others, the depth of innate depravity, he "justifies the ways of God to men," and traces all the unhappiness of this apostate world to its true source.—He had "fallen by his iniquity;" and when he "returned unto the Lord his God," it would no doubt be in the spirit of that language which was afterwards dictated by the prophet to the backsliding and revolting Israelites:—"Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips:" and the Lord "healed his backsliding, and loved him freely, and turned away his anger from him."—We may suppose him adopting the expressions of his father's penitence, and, in these appropriate terms, breathing out the feelings of a broken and contrite heart:—"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin (is) ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,

and done (this) evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, (and) be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden (part) thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; (that) the bones (which) thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me (with thy) free Spirit: (then) will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”*

Solomon fulfilled the resolution expressed in the last of these verses, when, after his recovery, he committed his experience to writing, penning this book, under the direction of the Spirit of God, for the warning and instruction of mankind.

From this passage, observe,

In the first place. We ought not to be greatly surprised, or to be easily shaken in mind, although we discover many things in the works and ways of God, that are above our comprehension.

Is it at all marvellous that it should be so? The

* Psal. li.*1—13.

works and ways of God are the works and ways of an infinite Being. Would it not be astonishing, then, were it otherwise?—There is hardly any thing in nature that is fully understood by us. We know a good deal of *effects*; but of *causes* wonderfully little. We frequently, indeed, impose upon ourselves, by using language that appears to indicate our acquaintance with causes; whereas, when the meaning is fairly analyzed, it is found to be no more than another way of expressing the effects. We say, for example, that a stone falls to the earth *by gravitation*; and that, by the same *cause*, the earth and other planets are attracted towards the sun, and kept in their respective orbits. But when we ask the question, What *is* gravitation? we are at a loss for a reply. A series of questions might follow, which would only bring us back to where we set out. The principle or power itself to which we have given a name, remains, as much as before, unknown to us. From the effect we infer that the power exists; but what the power is, we cannot tell; and it is only the effect that we can properly be said to know: respecting its secret nature we are profoundly in the dark.—So are we with regard to the nature of *substance*; our knowledge of bodies being confined to their sensible *qualities*.—The beautiful process of vegetation;—the principle of animal and vegetable life;—the connection of matter and spirit in our own frame, and the manner in which, by nervous influence, mind imparts activity to mat-

ter, and matter conveys sensations and perceptions to mind ; and ten thousand other things, with which we are so familiar as hardly to think of them, are, when examined, inexplicable mysteries.—Are we, then, entitled to expect, that every thing should be simple and easy of explanation in the nature, and in the moral dispensations, of Deity ? The expectation, would surely be unreasonable in the extreme. Well may we say, “That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?” “Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? (It is) high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof (is) longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.”*—O be humble ! Forget not that God alone is omniscient. Solomon found many things unfathomable. In all likelihood, the highest archangel in heaven finds many things unfathomable. Beware, then, of the pride of reason. Beware of that sceptical and unsound philosophy (“science, falsely so called”), which, in the plenitude of its inconsistent arrogance, is dissatisfied with every thing which it cannot fully comprehend ; which pretends to reject the bible for its mysteries, whilst it cannot lift an eye amidst the works of creation, without beholding itself surrounded by mysteries innumerable ; which, renouncing the guidance of Divine revelation, itself only

“ ——— leads to bewilder, and dazzles to blind.”

* Job xi. 7—9.

Let us rejoice, my brethren, that true wisdom, that which “makes wise unto salvation,” is revealed in the Divine word, in letters of light. Respecting *it*, no man needs to say, “I will be wise,” and still find wisdom “far from him.”—“This commandment which I command thee this day,” said Moses to the Israelites, “it (is) not hidden from thee, neither (is) it far off. It (is) not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither (is) it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word (is) very nigh unto thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.”* And what Moses said of the law, Paul affirms of the gospel: “The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? that is, to bring Christ down (from above):—or, Who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead. But what saith it? The word is very nigh thee, (even) in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto justification; and with the mouth confession is made unto salva-

* Deut. xxx. 11—14.

tion. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him: for whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

Secondly. Let all be admonished, and especially the young, to beware of “the pleasures of sin” which are but “for a season.”

You would smile at me in scorn, should I set about attempting to convince you that there are *no pleasures* in sin. Alas! the whole corruption of our nature teaches us, with an eloquence too powerfully persuasive, an opposite lesson. If there were no pleasures in sin, there would be no temptations in sin, nor any need for the warnings and threatenings by which we are so strongly and so frequently deterred from it in the word of God. There *are* pleasures in sin. But, oh! remember, there are many poisons that are sweet; sweet to the palate, but quickly convulsing the frame with the agonies of death. Think of the *nature* and think of the *end* of all sinful pleasures. Think of their nature. Will you venture to seek your happiness in opposition to your Maker,—in that which he has condemned, and which his soul hateth? If you do, then think of the certain *end* of such pleasures. They are at best but a palatable poison. There is death in them,—eternal death. At the

* Rom. x. 6—13.

last, they “bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder.”—Your own inward corruption, Satan the prince of this world, wicked men, and wicked women too, may tempt you to sin. But O forget not, that every temptation to sin is a temptation to ruin; to the perdition of soul and body in hell.—Let the experience of Solomon warn you,—let the experience of thousands besides warn you, not to tamper with temptation. Once give way,—and you cannot, nor can any man, tell how far you may go. The first step is a step of tremendous peril. Tremble to take it. It is a step to hell; “Flee from the wrath to come.” “Touch not the unclean thing.” “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men: avoid it; pass not by it; turn from it and pass away.”

Ye whom God has graciously rescued from the broad way that leadeth to destruction, and turned into the narrow way of life and salvation, be thankful for the grace that has “made you to differ.” And whilst with gratitude you say, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give praise;” say also, in the spirit of humble dependence, “Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.” “Lead me not into temptation.” “Lead me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou (art) the God of my salvation: on thee do I wait all the day.”

Thirdly. The proneness of all mankind to seek happiness in other things, than in the favour and

service and image of God, clearly shows them to be a fallen race.

Many have been the disputes of men about the chief good. There was no such dispute in paradise : there is no such dispute in heaven. Man's original happiness was in God :—the happiness of angels is in God :—there is no happiness in the universe, but in God ;—in the favour, in the likeness, in the service, and enjoyment of God. All the “ inventions ” of men for the attainment of happiness, and “ many ” they have been, long experience has proved to be folly. The gospel of Christ proposes the only means of effectually gaining it : because its end is to bring men back to the source from which it originally sprung ;—to restore them to the Divine favour, and to the Divine image. Whatever accomplishes this, will make men happy ; and nothing short of this possibly can.—O what reason for humility, in contemplating the vain endeavours of men to effect an absolute impossibility ;—to find happiness without God ! And what reason for thanksgiving and praise for an open way, in which we may return with acceptance to our offended Sovereign, and enjoy the light of his countenance. “ I am the way, the truth, and the life : no man cometh to the Father but by me.” Keep in this way, my Christian brethren. It is the way of peace, of holiness, of life.—And hear, ye careless ones, the warning voice of the Son of God, “ the faithful witness.” It is the voice of love and

mercy :—“ Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able,—when once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door ; and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us : then will I profess unto you, I never knew you ; depart from me, all (ye) workers of iniquity.”* “ He that is wise shall be wise for himself ; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.”

* Luke xiii. 24—27.

LECTURE XV.

ECCLES. VIII. 1—8.

1 “ *Who (is) as the wise (man)? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man’s wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.*
2 *I (counsel thee) to keep the king’s commandment, and*
3 *(that) in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth*
4 *whatsoever pleaseth him. Where the word of a king (is,*
5 *there is) power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou? Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil*
6 *thing: and a wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment. Because to every purpose there is time and*
7 *judgment; therefore the misery of man (is) great upon him. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who*
8 *can tell him when it shall be? (There is) no man that hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit; neither (hath he) power in the day of death: and (there is) no discharge in (that) war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.”*

SOLOMON commences this chapter with a repetition of the praises of wisdom, which he had before affirmed to excel folly as far as light excelleth darkness.—“ *Who (is) as the wise (man)?*” A sound

understanding, a cultivated mind, and discriminating prudence, all under the governing influence of “the fear of the Lord;”—these constitute true wisdom. And when viewed in this light, surely none will hesitate to admit, that “wisdom is the principal thing.” Riches, nobility, power, confer no eminence comparable to that which arises from superior intelligence, in union with superior piety. “Who (is) as the wise (man)?”—who can be compared to him, in real intrinsic excellence, or in the benefits which accrue to him from his wisdom?

“And who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?”—that is, who, *as* the wise man,—or who *but* the wise man, knoweth it? “The interpretation of a thing,” I should understand as comprehending in general the *solution of difficulties*, whether in nature, in providence, or in the affairs of men. This is the province of the wise man. He has observed the appearances, and investigated the secrets, of nature:—he has carefully marked the procedure of providence, ascertaining its principles, and noting its mysteries:—he has studied human nature in all its varieties of character, human life in all its diversities of condition, and society in all its multiplicity of interests and connections. He understands these things himself, and he is consulted respecting them by others.

“A man’s wisdom maketh his face to shine.” The beauty of the “human face divine” lies in its expression. The light of wisdom within, beams in

the countenance, imparting to it the attractive aspect of intelligence and sensibility. It is a mild and lovely light. It does not dazzle and overpower by the studied brilliance of self-display, but with soft and gentle radiance inspires delight, and wins affection; for of genuine wisdom, self-diffident humility is the invariable associate. "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." Such wisdom gives to the countenance the expression both of dignity and of grace. It commands reverence, and it ensures love. It conducts at once to honour and to friendship, to respectful deference, and familiar intimacy.

The humility and gentleness which accompany and characterize true wisdom, are by many understood to be meant in the last clause of the verse: "and the boldness of his face shall be changed." It shall be "changed," say they, to meekness and self-diffidence, the opposite of that forward and brazen impudence which so frequently distinguishes ignorance and folly.

Others interpret "boldness" in a good sense, as signifying firmness and decision, fortitude and resolution of character, which render a man undaunted and effective in supporting the cause of truth and rectitude, and resisting the encroachments of vice and folly; in facing opposition, and disregarding obloquy. Amongst such a people, for example, as those whom Ezekiel had to encounter, wisdom

would set the face as a flint, and enable its possessor to confront them with a self-possession and commanding confidence, fitted to intimidate and repress their hardened effrontery. “The house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel (are) impudent and hard-hearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant, harder than flint, have I made thy forehead: fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they (be) a rebellious house.”*

It will at once occur to you, that if this sense of the word “boldness” be adopted, some corresponding alteration becomes necessary on the word “changed.” By the interpreters in question, the clause is accordingly rendered, “and the boldness of his countenance *shall be doubled*.” But this is a far-fetched and unusual sense of the original word; if indeed it will bear it at all.

The direct and proper meaning of the Hebrew word is *to hate*; and the Septuagint translation is probably the just one,—“but he who is impudent of face shall be hated.”† Instead of procuring, as wisdom does, respect and affection, the forward impudence and shamelessness of the fool will expose him to dislike and aversion. Men look with plea-

* Ezek. iii. 7—9.

† “He who is strong, *i. e.* impudent with his face, shall be hated.”—*Parkhurst*.—“Wisdom enliveneth a man’s countenance, but austerity in the looks is hateful.”—*Hodgson*.

sure on the countenance that is lighted up with mild intelligence, but turn away with disgust from the unblushing stare of petulance and self-sufficiency.

To the advice addressed to us in the following verses, it will be our interest, as it is our duty, carefully to attend. It is a part of that "meekness of wisdom," which "makes the face to shine," and is opposed to the effrontery that is the object of such universal dislike, and often the occasion to a man of so much injury:—"I (counsel thee) to keep the king's commandment, and (that) in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him."

The former of these two verses is by some rendered—"Keep the commandment of the king; but according to the word of the oath of God:"—which makes the last clause restrictive of the first; limiting and qualifying the injunction to loyal obedience:—as if Solomon had said, "Obey the king; but only in as far as this obedience can be yielded in consistency with your engagements to God, the King of kings, the Supreme Ruler, the Lord of the conscience, whose authority is first and highest."—That such a limitation of the precept is necessary to be understood, admits of no question. To the mightiest of earthly monarchs, when his commands are not in harmony with those of heaven, but call for a violation of "conscience to-

wards God," we must say, with all respectful mildness, yet with immoveable determination, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye:"—"We must obey God rather than men."*

In this view of the words, the expression "the oath of God" might possibly mean the oath so frequently taken by Jehovah himself to maintain his word inviolate, confirming "by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie" both his promises to obedience and his threatenings against transgression. "As I live, saith the Lord God," gives the promise all its power of encouragement, and the threatening all its energy of dissuasion.

The more simple and probable meaning, however, is, the oath of fidelity and allegiance to the king which they had taken in the name of God,—in his presence, and under appeal to Him and his awful sanction. You have sworn obedience and fealty: see that ye do not forswear yourselves, by disobedience and rebellion.

"Be not hasty to go out of his sight:"—that is, either to leave his presence, or to throw up your office and quit his service with inconsiderate rashness, under the hurrying influence of caprice or passion; whether the king be displeased with you, or you with him. Be not imprudently hasty and precipitate. "If the spirit of the ruler rise up

* Acts iv. 19. v. 29.

against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences." Quickness and irritability of temper are culpable towards any man; they are particularly reprehensible towards one to whom we owe the highest official respect.

"Stand not," (that is, persist not,) "in an evil thing:"—If you are conscious of having done wrong, be prompt to confess it, and to submit thyself to the royal clemency. Do not persist in high-spirited self-vindication, whilst you are secretly sensible of your error. There are some tempers so peculiar, so proudly peculiar, that they will much rather make confession to an equal, and still more readily to an inferior, than to one who is above them. But readiness to own an error or a fault is our duty to all. It is a part of true wisdom. It amounts to saying,—what a man must be very self-sufficient indeed who is unwilling to say,—
"I am sensible that I *may* err; and in seeing my error to-day, I am wiser and better minded than I was yesterday."

A special reason is assigned for the admonition, as it regards our conduct to rulers:—"for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him." Whilst your first and most sacred regard should be to the "oath of God," yet your own interest is also involved. You are in the king's power. He may degrade you from your station, deprive you of your emoluments, and inflict upon you such punishment as shall not be alleviated by the consciousness of its being un-

deserved. The headstrong passion that persists in evil, because it cannot brook submission, is itself inexcusable; and it may cost you dear: for,

Verse 4. “Where the word of a king (is, there is) power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?”—The royal authority is accompanied with power; so that what it wills and ordains it has ability to carry into execution. Perverse resistance and obstinate self-vindication are, therefore, vain and hazardous. It is your interest, as well as your duty, to confess and to submit. “For who may say unto him, What doest thou?”

There are cases,—there were then, and there are still,—in which to say so would not only be proper, but an incumbent duty. The man who has been called in providence to the high and important station of a counsellor to royalty, is under the most sacred obligations, both to his master and to his country, to fulfil his trust with incorruptible integrity; obligations which he ought to feel, even apart from “the oath of God;” though he should not forget that it also lies upon him. If the king discovers an inclination to adopt and to follow unjust, oppressive, or otherwise pernicious measures, such a man, as he must answer to God, should feel himself bound, with all becoming respect indeed, yet with unshaken firmness, and at whatever risk, to “say to him, What doest thou?” and to endeavour, by all possible means of persuasion, to “stay his hand.” A counsellor that has

principle to do this, is the greatest blessing, (alas ! that the blessing should in all ages have been so rare !) that a monarch can possess. If his master feels not the value of his faithful counsel, and, in the pride and folly of his heart, will take his own way, such a counsellor will be venerated in his abdication or his downfall ; and having, like Micajah, the son of Imlah—(“faithful only he, among the faithless!”)—exonerated his conscience by wholesome, though unpalatable, advice, he will enjoy also the blessing of inward peace, even if the consequences of his fidelity should to himself be irons and a dungeon, with “bread of affliction, and water of affliction.”

But it is not at all of such firmness of integrity that Solomon here speaks. It is of the man who “persists in an evil thing.” It is from *this* that he dissuades, as implying at once sin and folly ; the sin of adding the vindication of evil to the doing of it, and the folly of provoking, by such fool-hardiness, a power so far superior to his own.

The best way, accordingly, of shunning the king’s displeasure, and the vengeance of the law, is prescribed in the fifth verse :—“Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing ; and a wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment.”

“The commandment” here, may mean either “the king’s commandment,” according to the

phrase in the second verse,—or rather, perhaps, the commandment of God; by which may be understood the will or law of God in general. By the precepts of that law, indeed, which He had given to Israel, it was the duty both of the king and people respectively to regulate their conduct: that law the people were to obey; that law the king was to enforce. “The king’s commandment,” therefore, might be considered as the law of the land, given by the Divine Legislator himself: and the sentiment expressed is, that the best and surest way to the enjoyment of a “quiet and peaceable life,” under the secure protection of the governing powers, was “to live in all godliness and honesty.” He who thus “kept the commandment” should “feel no evil thing.” “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?”—The sentiment, directions, and language of Solomon in this passage, bear so close a resemblance to those of Paul, when he writes on the same subject to the Christians at Rome, that we may quote the latter as a New Testament commentary on the former:—“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers; for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves condemnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou, then, not be afraid of the power?

Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same : for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid ; for he beareth not the sword in vain ; for he is the minister of God, a revenger, to (execute) wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore, ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also : for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render, therefore, to all their dues ; tribute to whom tribute (is due) ; custom to whom custom ; fear to whom fear ; honour to whom honour."*—It is evident, that these apostolic precepts are just those of Solomon in a more expanded form. The same "counsel" is given ; it is enforced by the same considerations, of "wrath" and of "conscience ;" and the same means are prescribed for shunning the severity of the ruling power ;—called by Solomon, "keeping the commandment," by Paul, "doing that which is good."

There are many good people who are very imprudent people. Their behaviour is in the main excellent ; but, on many occasions, it is exceedingly inappropriate. There is an entire want about them of that discretion, so needful in the intercourse of life, which enables its possessor to suit his conduct to time and circumstances. Herein consists another eminent advantage of the man of wisdom :—"A

* Rom. xiii. 1—7.

wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment."

The word translated "judgment" is one of very extensive and general signification; being applicable to all ordering, regulation, disposition, arrangement, of events, actions, or things. It might here, perhaps, be correctly enough rendered *propriety*; according to which every thing has its right place and due adjustment with others, in the conduct of life. There are *three* inquiries, which the man of true wisdom is ever proposing to himself:—*What* should I do? *When* should I do it? *How* should it be done? He pays regard not only to the *matter* or *quality* of his actions, but to the *time* and the *manner* of them. He attends to circumstances, in every department of his conduct; whether in executing his own good purposes, or in repressing and frustrating the evil designs of others; in imparting counsel; in administering reproof; in seeking, either for himself or for others, the redress of grievances; in promoting needful improvement and reform, whether in private or in public affairs; and in all the every-day transactions and intercourse of life;—never forgetting, what daily experience more and more confirms, that success very often depends as much on the choice of a right season, and the adoption of a proper way of performing an action, as upon the action itself.—There are many persons, on the contrary, who satisfy themselves with the first only of the inquiries I

have mentioned. They mind the *What*, but utterly disregard the *When* and the *How*; and, their actions being in themselves irreprehensible, they marvel that any fault should be found with them. What have they done that's wrong? And when they are told they have not been wrong in what they have done, but have chosen a wrong time and a wrong manner of doing it; they feel very lightly under the charge, and congratulate themselves on the admitted rectitude of the deed itself. That is enough for them.

This is very unwise: and indiscretion of this kind has ever been an abundant source of unhappiness to men:—Verse 6. “Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man (is) great upon him.”

The degree of mischief, and disappointment, and wretchedness, arising amongst mankind from the want of wise consideration of seasons and circumstances, is beyond calculation. Were men in general more carefully attentive to these, a large proportion of the miseries of which they complain might readily be avoided. But some by their weakness, others by their heedlessness,—some by their headstrong obstinacy, others by their excess of pliancy, some by impatient precipitation, others by procrastinating dilatoriness, and thousands in an endless variety of other ways, are led to overlook “time and judgment,” and to bring distress and ruin upon themselves, or others, or both.

Although, however, “the misery of man is,” by these means, “greater upon him,”—much greater, than it would otherwise be ; yet many, at the same time, are the circumstances, which human foresight cannot anticipate, which elude the penetration of the most sagacious, and over which the most vigilant can exercise no control. The memory of the past is not associated in man, unless by immediate prophetic inspiration, with the pre-science of the future. The events of coming time being beyond the sphere of our acutest vision, we must, in very many cases, if we act at all, act upon a calculation of probabilities. So that the wisest of men, and far more those who are deficient in ordinary foresight, are liable to risks, from unanticipated contingencies, in almost all that they do. From this source, also, there arise much disquieting solicitude, frustration of hope, and consequent unhappiness.—This is the sentiment expressed in the seventh verse :—

“For he knoweth not that which shall be : for who can tell him when it shall be ?”—He knows not himself what events are to come in future time ; and all his fellows being alike ignorant, he can obtain from no one of them any information, either of the events themselves, or of the seasons of their occurrence : an humbling truth, of which we are often reminded in scripture, to impress us with a sense of our entire dependence. “Boast not thyself of to-morrow ; for thou knowest not what a

day may bring forth.”* “Go to, now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not what (shall be) on the morrow : for what (is) your life ? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away ? For that ye (ought) to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that.”†

There is one event,—an event appointed to all, respecting the time and circumstances of which this uncertainty is proverbially great ; an event on which, in the prosecution of our various schemes, we are too little disposed to calculate ; yet an event, which has, times innumerable, interrupted and thrown into confusion and ruin, the plans and pursuits of men ; entailing mischief on their associates in speculation, and on their families or expectant heirs.—You have anticipated the event to which I allude. Of *death* it may always with emphasis be said, “who can tell him when it shall be ?” It is by God, the giver of life, that “our days are determined ; the number of our months is with him ; he has appointed us our bounds, that we cannot pass.”—No ; “we *cannot pass* :”—for whensoever the time fixed in his sovereign purpose for our removal arrives, then, in the language of verse 8th,—“(There is) no man that hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit, neither (hath he) power in the day of death : and (there is) no discharge in (that)

* Prov. xxvii. 1.

† James iv. 15—15.

war ; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it."

"(There is) no man that hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit,"—that is, to keep the soul in its earthly tabernacle one instant longer than God's appointed time. This is true of every man, and true both in regard to himself and to others. The power that sways millions with a nod, fails here. The wealth that procures for its owner all that his heart can wish, fails here. The might of the warrior which has slain its thousands, and which no human arm could withstand, fails here. The most earnest desire of life ; and the tears, and the wailings, and the fond caresses of disconsolate affection ;—all fail here. No man, from the prince to the beggar, has power over his own spirit, or over the spirit of the dearest friend on earth, to retain it—no, not for one moment ; any more than he can arrest time in its course, or stay the speed of the impetuous tempest. This is a power that resides in God alone. He gave life ; he sustains it ; he sets the time of its continuance. He could add to Hezekiah's life fourteen years, as he could prolong the day, by bringing back the shadow on the dial of Ahaz. Nay, he could, by his incommunicable power, restore the parted soul to its earthly residence, after it had fled away to the world of spirits. But such power is not in man, nor in any creature : and on the Divine exercise of it, which is sovereign and

uncontrollable, we are incessantly dependent. "If HE set his heart upon man, (if) he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath ; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust."*

"Neither (hath he) power in the day of death." —In that day, all power becomes alike impotent. All bodily vigour gives way ; and all mental resources and devices are equally unavailing against the last enemy. Whatever may be the wishes of a man's heart, he has no ability to effect them. Opposition is vain. For the power of death is, in truth, the power of God. When we speak of Death as a person, and call him "the King of Terrors," I need not say we use a mere figure of poetry or rhetoric.—When a physician succeeds in arresting the progress of a distemper, and bringing up from the gates of death the life that was hanging in suspense, let us beware of fancying that he counteracts any Divine intention ; he fulfils one. His success only indicates what the purpose of providence had been ; that the sickness should not be unto death. The design to add fourteen years to Hezekiah's life preceded the intimation of it, and the application of the simple means prescribed for its accomplishment. And although we have no intimation of the intentions of heaven, yet are we equally sure that the efficacy of means of recovery, in answer to prayer for the Divine blessing, only shows us what these intentions, though previously

* Job xxxiv. 14, 15.

kept secret, had been ; does not frustrate, but accomplish them.

“ And (there is) no discharge in (that) war.”—Every individual must grapple with the last enemy. There is no possibility, whatever may be our dread of the conflict, of procuring a discharge, and shunning its horrors. No flight and no concealment can save us ; nor are there any weapons of effectual resistance. “ He counts darts as stubble, and laughs at the shaking of the spear.”—And it is not here, as on the plains of Thessaly, or the mountains of Gilboa, or the fields of Waterloo, or (to the personal feelings of the speaker, more sadly interesting than them all) the heights of Salamanca ;* where, though hundreds and thousands fell, hundreds and thousands escaped and survived. This is a field in which every man must advance ; and every man must advance alone, to single combat ; and every man in succession must fall. The enemy to be encountered is himself invulnerable ; and whether the struggle be short or long, and however successful for a time our efforts may be to parry or to cover ourselves from his deadly thrust, he will, sooner or later, find his way, with certain aim and irresistible force, to every heart.—If we reckon the population of our world at a thousand millions, and the average of a generation at thirty years, it will follow, that

* In the Battle of Salamanca, the author's brother fell. The reader will excuse this little anachronism ; for such it will seem from the statement in the Preface, of the time when these Lectures were first delivered.

ninety thousand die every day, upwards of sixty every minute, one every second of time. How solemn the thought! How rapidly is the world of spirits peopling! And, alas! that there should be so much reason to fear, that, in past generations at least, whatever may be the case in those to come, hell has been peopled so much faster than heaven!

Whilst men of all stations are the indiscriminate victims of death, so are men of all characters. To the children of God, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." They may meet the last enemy without dismay; as a friend, rather than an enemy,—a friend, that comes to introduce them to God. To the wicked he is emphatically the King of Terrors. Fondly would they stay his approach; fondly would they shun the combat; dreading (as well they may) the fearful consequences. But in vain:—

"Neither shall wickedness deliver them that are given to it."—The profligate, the ungodly, the worldly, might, in the midst of their vicious, or of their busy and unthinking career, laugh at the fears of death, and set the God of heaven at scornful defiance. But "God is not mocked." Death will have his prey. All the power and all the arts of the wicked cannot withhold it. They must die, and "be driven away in their wickedness." They may say, in the pride and folly of their minds, "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not reach unto us:"—

but they are only “swelling words of vanity;” God says to them, “Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand : when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, ye shall be trodden down by it.”*

This passage suggests the following practical reflections.

In the first place. The additional eulogy of wisdom, should operate as an additional excitement to seek it from heaven, and to cultivate it by all the means of its increase ; as at once the richest excellence, the loveliest ornament, the strongest recommendation, and the most efficient instrument of good, in any character. Let what Solomon says here impress his exhortations elsewhere :—“Get wisdom, get understanding ; forget (it) not : neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee ; love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom (is) the principal thing ; (therefore) get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee ; she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thy head an ornament of gold ; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. Take fast hold of instruction ; let (her) not go : keep her ; for she (is) thy life.”†

Secondly. Let us manifest the influence of religious principle, in becoming subjection to the go-

* Isa. xxviii. 14—18.

† Prov. iv. 5—9, 13.

vernment of our country ; from considerations both of duty and of discretion. We should feel it incumbent upon us, “to shun all exasperating language; to repress all railing and indecent accusations against those who have the management of public affairs; to engage in no virulent opposition, or hasty measures; to continue in our place and station; not to enter upon, much less to persist in, any turbulent attempts; nor needlessly to expose ourselves to the jealousy and resentment of Government.”*—Not that we must approve, in our judgment, of every public measure; or that we are never to join in temperate and constitutional means of procuring the correction of abuses, and the rescinding of injurious decisions, the alteration of what is wrong, or the improvement of what is right. But in all, we should be prudent and temperate; influenced by sober principle and genuine patriotic regard to our country, not by presumptuous self-conceit, or revolutionary phrenzy.—And surely I may be permitted to say, that never was there a period in the history of Europe, when the duty was more imperative, of being cautious, and diffident, and tender, in our censures of public men, and public measures, than it is in the present day. Events have been so strange,—they have, in innumerable instances, so completely contradicted all the ordinary calculations of probability; that, without a superhuman

* Scott's Commentary.

gift of foresight, no man could have at all anticipated, or provided against them. Never was there a season to which the language of the seventh verse was more applicable,—“he knoweth not that which shall be; and who can tell him when it shall be?”—never a period at which a wise man could find it more difficult, in devising public measures, to “discern time and judgment;” or when it was more unsafe and unfair, to judge of such measures by their success or their failure. The constant wakeful vigilance of a free people over the plans and proceedings of their rulers, is of inestimable benefit. But at such a time as this, few things can be more offensive to every Christian feeling, than to hear men persist in talking, with indiscriminate severity of censure, of the folly and impolicy of all the measures of the administration. It displays so intolerable a share of arrogant self-confidence, coupled with a deficiency so lamentable of charity and candour.*

Thirdly. Let us all recollect, and keep it in constant remembrance, that there is ONE KING, in whose hands, and in whose hands alone, unlimited power is safe; whose word is law; and in obeying whose authority we can never err. His commands are all right; and they are all beyond dispute. To *his* authority let us yield a willing and unreserved

* These observations were originally delivered in February, 1811. They are retained without alteration, because, in the spirit of them, they are applicable to all times, and especially to all seasons of public difficulty and embarrassment, arising from the perplexing darkness of providential arrangements.

subjection: for "his law is perfect; his statutes are right; his commandment is pure; his judgments are true and righteous altogether."—If such be the imprudence, such the hazard, of obstinate disobedience to an earthly monarch; how imminent, think you, must be the peril, how extreme the folly, of the man, who scorns the rebukes of his Maker, and hardens himself against God? Who hath ever done so, and hath prospered? The words of admonition, "Stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him: where the word of a king (is, there is) power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou?"—may here be applied with unlimited emphasis. Yes: where the word of THIS KING is, there is power; almighty, irresistible power; power, which no created arm can defy with impunity.—Whilst you carefully endeavour to order your temporal affairs with that discretion which may ensure success and prosperity; O with what miserable imprudence do you conduct yourselves, whilst you live in forgetfulness of God, and in thoughtless disregard of death, and judgment, and eternity! No imprudence can be equal to this. "A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment." Is it then consistent with the character of a wise man;—does it accord with the dictates of that prudence, which you wish to apply to the regulation of all your concerns; that, although you know "the time to be short" and proverbially uncertain, and eternal consequences to be depending

on every moment that passes over you, you should live unprepared for eternity? Is it prudent in you, conscious as you must be of guilt, to run the risk of encountering the displeasure of an offended God, and to pay no attention to the nature and the vouchers of what comes to you in the form and with the claims of a proposal from him? Be persuaded to think, and to think now. Be wise to-day: to-morrow is not yours.

Fourthly. Let these admonitions be enforced, by the absolute and infallible certainty of your coming to death. Had you “power over the spirit to retain the spirit,” or could you procure a “discharge” from the conflict with the last enemy;—could you prolong your life at pleasure, and secure to yourselves immortality on earth; then might you, with some pretensions to reason, disregard our serious warnings, and take your own way. But well you know, it is far otherwise. The hour of your departure is to you, as it is to all, a secret: “Who can tell you when it shall be?” But it is fixed;—fixed in the purpose of Him “without whom a sparrow falleth not to the ground.” It is fixed;—and, for aught you can tell, it may be very near. You may not be destined to see the shining of to-morrow’s sun; and, if you should, to-morrow will still be as uncertain as to-day. Many of those who are dying to-day had as little thought of it yesterday, as those who are living to-day have of dying to-morrow. The “King of terrors” you

must meet,—you *must* encounter : and it is a conflict in which “the help of man is vain ;” in which fellow-creatures can do you no service. And will you, then, engage this enemy alone? Will you enter the lists with him single-handed? Will you meet him without the armour of God?—without the shield of faith, and the helmet of hope? without the breastplate of righteousness, and the sword of the Spirit? Will you venture into the dark valley, without the Lord with you,—without his rod and his staff to comfort you? Will you be your own light,—your own strength,—your own salvation? O blind self-sufficiency! O thoughtless and infatuated presumption! You give this a wrong name when you call it courage. It is insensibility;—the insensibility of ignorance.—Look unto Jesus. He has “abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light, by the gospel.” “Through death, he has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Believing in him, building your hopes on him, living to him, you will be safe; and no otherwise. You may then anticipate death with a measure of his feelings who said, “To me to live is Christ; and to die is gain. I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.” And at the solemn hour when you must bid a final adieu to the world, when to you “time shall be no longer,”

you may say, in humble, yet triumphant, confidence,
“O death! where (is) thy sting? O grave! where
(is) thy victory? The sting of death (is) sin; and
the strength of sin (is) the law: but thanks (be)
unto God, who giveth us the victory through our
Lord Jesus Christ.”

LECTURE XVI.

ECCLES. viii. 9—17.

- 9 “ *All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun : (there is) a time wherein*
10 *one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where*
11 *they had so done. This (is) also vanity. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to*
12 *do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his (days) be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, who fear before him :*
13 *But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong (his) days, (which are) as a shadow ; because he*
14 *feareth not before God. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth ; that there be just (men), unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked : again, there be wicked (men), to whom it happeneth according to the work*
15 *of the righteous. I said, that this also (is) vanity. Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry ; for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life,*
16 *which God giveth him under the sun. When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth : [for also (there is that) neither day*

17 *nor night seeth sleep with his eyes :]* Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun : because though a man labour to seek (it) out, yet he shall not find (it) ; yea, further, though a wise (man) think to know (it), yet shall he not be able to find (it).

APART from Divine testimony, observation and experience are the surest grounds of accurate knowledge. In the book of Ecclesiastes, we have not the thoughts and opinions of a man, who, with little or no attention to facts, sits down in his closet, to commit to writing, the speculations, conjectures, and theories of an inventive and ingenious mind. We have the results of a personal survey ; of a close and acute inspection of men and things ; confirmed, in many instances, by actual trial, and recorded under the superintendence of the Spirit of truth. The book, therefore, possesses a peculiar interest, as combining, in the lessons which it teaches, the evidence of human experiment with the sanction of Divine authority.

“ All this have I *seen*,” says Solomon, in the first of these verses, “ and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun :”—that is, to the attentive observation, and diligent scrutiny, both of the procedure of providence towards this world, and of the conduct of mankind in the various conditions of life.—And in the course of his survey, there was one thing which he had not unfrequently remarked,—that superiority to others, the posses-

sion and exercise of authority, was coveted by many, without due consideration of its tendencies; that unless the power be well and wisely used, it had better, even for the sake of its possessor, be wanted: “(There is) a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.”

Had not Solomon himself experienced the truth of this? His royal honour was at once his temptation to sin, and his opportunity; and in sinning himself, he led his subjects astray along with him. This turned out “to his own hurt,” as well as to the hurt of his people; for it was in consequence of this perversion of his authority by which he “made Israel to sin,” that the Lord stirred up against him various adversaries, to harass him, and to disturb the peace of his reign, and forewarned him of the rending away of ten of the tribes of Israel from the dominions of his son.—Besides, as Solomon when forsaking Jehovah, following the world, and “going after strange gods,” could not be satisfied with himself; and as a conscience that is ill at ease, a self-upbraiding spirit, usually produces a very unhappy effect upon the temper, rendering a man, in his conduct towards others, hasty, passionate, sullen, and capricious; it is not improbable that some ground had been given by him, during the time especially of his defection from the service of God, for the complaints afterwards made by his subjects to his son and successor respecting the grievousness of his yoke, when they presented their unsuccessful

petition for its mitigation, and for a gentler system of rule.

The influence of a disquieted conscience in producing angry and capricious rigour, is exemplified in the case of Asa ; who, when reproved by Hanani the seer, for his folly and distrust of Jehovah, and threatened, as his punishment, with wars for the remainder of his reign, “ was wroth with the seer, and put him in the prison house : and Asa,” it is added in the history, “ oppressed (some) of the people the same time.” He wreaked his unreasonable anger against this prophet, and his secret rankling dissatisfaction with himself, in acts of passionate severity towards his subjects.

Some of Solomon’s successors in the throne of Judah, and many, alas ! of the kings of Israel, might be produced as exemplifications of the truth here stated ; and not a few might be added from the general history of both ancient and modern nations. —Often have unprincipled and oppressive tyrants brought upon themselves the vengeance of their subjects, and come to an untimely end. They have “ ruled over others to their own hurt ;” their power having prospered for a time, but ultimately involved them in insurrection and ruin. And even if they should escape the indignant fury of the oppressed, still the abuse of power is to their hurt ; for “ he that is higher than the highest regardeth,” and they “ treasure up to themselves wrath against

the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgments of God.”

It is, primarily at least, to such characters, that the tenth verse refers :—“ And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy ; and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This (is) also vanity.”

By “ the place of the holy ” some understand the seat of judgment, which in chap. iii. 16. had been denominated “ the place of righteousness.” It is the place which ought to be occupied by the holy, and not by the wicked, and over which the Most Holy may be considered as presiding, with peculiar jealousy of its purity, and displeasure at its corruption. And, by the wicked being *buried* who had occupied this honourable seat, they conceive to be meant, his being buried with all the splendour of funeral pomp, with all the ceremonial of lamentation and wo :—whilst their being “ forgotten in the city ” is thought to refer to the change produced in the public mind by death ;—to that kind of good-natured disposition which leads men to say no ill of the dead,—to deal gently with their faults,—to palliate and even to banish from their remembrance the very enormities for which they cursed them during their lives ; and to honour in death those who disgraced themselves in life.

But this view is neither natural in itself, nor suitable to the connection.—Solomon had said, in the eighth verse, that “ wickedness could not deliver

those that were given to it," from the stroke of death:—nay, at times, as he adds in the ninth verse, a man's wickedness, especially in the abuse of power, might prove the means of hurt and ruin to himself. It is the same sentiment that he continues to illustrate in verse 10.—“ I saw the wicked, who had come and gone from the place of the holy,”—who had attended the sanctuary, joined in the worship of God, and cloaked their unrighteousness and oppression under the garb of external piety,—who had “ come and gone,” continuing their hypocritical career in safety, no marks of Divine vengeance visiting them for their awful profanation and odious dissembling;—I saw the wicked, who had lately flourished in their wickedness, who, in the possession of great power, had “ prospered in bringing evil devices to pass,”—I saw them *buried*,—the victims of mortality equally with others; unable any more than the meanest and the weakest of their oppressed subjects “ to retain the spirit,” and having no power more than they in the day of death:—I saw them *buried*,—carried, in affecting humiliation and impotence, to “ the house appointed for all living.”—And this was not only the “ land of forgetfulness,” as to any knowledge on their part of what was passing amongst men; but the “ land of forgetfulness,” as to the remembrance of them by their survivors on earth:—“ They were forgotten in the city where they had so done.” They had sought after, and

expected, perpetual fame : but men had no pleasure in remembering them ; when out of sight, they were out of mind ; their name and memory rotted with their carcasses in the dust.—The sentiment is similar to that expressed by the Psalmist :—“ I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree : yet he passed away, and lo ! he (was) not ; yea I sought him, but he could not be found.”*

I have considered the expression, “ who had *come and gone* from the place of the holy,” as implying the continuance of the course described, without interruption by any interposition of heaven, or indication of Divine displeasure. The forbearance of God, and the abuse of it by men for their encouragement in sin, are accordingly introduced with more particular emphasis, in the eleventh versé :

“ Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”—A matter of fact is stated in these words, with its sad and fatal influence on the minds and characters of ungodly and inconsiderate men. “ Sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily.” Particular sins are not, in the Divine administration, visited with instant punishment. Nay, even the man who lives in sin, in the daily and hourly defiance of every restraint, and the fearless violation of every precept

* Psalm xxxvii. 35, 36.

of heaven, is allowed to pursue his course without the immediate arrest of judicial vengeance. The lips of the blasphemer are not sealed in death the moment he has uttered his blasphemy: he lives to repeat it a thousand and a thousand times. Week after week is the sabbath-breaker spared, to profane in succession the days of God. The arm of justice is not instantly put forth upon the murderer, while the life-blood is warm on his guilty hands, to hurry him away to the judgment-seat of God. The secrets of impurity are not immediately brought out to light, detected, exposed, and punished, by Him, from whose eye "no darkness or shadow of death can hide the workers of iniquity." The haughty tyrant, the persecuting oppressor, is not always, in the flush of his impious arrogance, smitten by the angel of the Lord, because he gives not God the glory.* The "unprofitable servant,"—the useless cumberer of the ground, is not cut down in his first barren season, but spared through many a year of fruitlessness and vain expectation. Sinners of every name, and of every degree, continue to live, and continue to prosper.

Such being the order of the Divine administration, such the forbearance and long-suffering of God, the corrupt and infatuated children of men, bent on the indulgence of their sinful lusts and passions, "encourage themselves in an evil way;" they strengthen themselves in wickedness; hand

* See Acts xii. 20—23.

joins in hand, in the combinations of iniquity; “their heart is fully set in them to do evil.”

Future and unseen things make a much less lively impression on the mind than things that are present and seen. This world meets the senses in ten thousand forms of temptation, whilst the world to come is far off and invisible. The pleasures of sin are immediate, affording present gratification: its future consequences are distant and unfelt.—That too which men, from whatever principle, wish to be true, they are naturally prone to believe; the judgment being the dupe of the heart, and the heart “deceitful above all things.” They are fond of thinking that sin will not expose them to such irremediable vengeance as the bible threatens. They are willing to be persuaded of this; and they flatter themselves into the persuasion, by the wiles of a thousand sophistries.—At first, it may be, they commit sin with a timid heart and a trembling hand. They hesitate long. But at length, though with irresolute tremor, it is done. No harm comes to them. No indications of the anger of Heaven follow the deed. They feel themselves safe. And, having tasted of the sin, it is sweet; and they desire it again. It is done again; still with scruple and shrinking, but with less than before. The third time, their apprehensions are still weaker; and they learn, with less and less remorse, to “walk in the counsel of the ungodly, to stand in the way of sinners, and to sit in the seat of the scornful.”

Finding, that they are not struck dead on the spot,—that “sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily,” they begin to suspect whether God be actually privy to their words and deeds; to say in their hearts to themselves, and with flattering lips to one another, “God hath forgotten; he hideth his face, he will never see it.” They doubt of providence; or they flatter themselves that surely the Supreme Ruler, if he exists at all, and takes any notice of the affairs of men, cannot be such an enemy to sin as he has been represented; that he will be very merciful and lenient to the frailties of his erring creatures; for how, say they, are we to know what he means to do in future, if not by what he does now? He will not be strict to mark iniquity; he is good; and goodness shall at last carry the day. Thus they gradually cast off restraint, contemn God, and say, “He will not require it.”—This is a fearful process; but there is reason to apprehend, it is not a very uncommon one. Wicked men are, in reference to a judgment to come, like Pharaoh of old, who persisted in hardening his heart against God, always “when he saw that there was respite.”

Such is the way in which the suspension of the sentence of God against sin,—the delay of punishment, affects the corrupt hearts of “the sons of men.” Instead of “the goodness of God leading them to repentance,” they take advantage of it; they “despise the riches of his goodness, and forbear-

ance, and long-suffering, and after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

But it is an awful delusion:—verses 12, 13. "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his (days) be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, who fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong (his) days, (which are) as a shadow; because he feareth not before God."

"Though a sinner do evil a hundred times," that is, ever so many times; "and his (days) be prolonged,"—no deadly vengeance lighting on his trespasses;—though from present impunity, he become unceasingly bold in sin, going on from bad to worse, till, at the hundredth time, his conscience becomes "seared as with a hot iron:"—yet still there *is* a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not. "Surely I know,"—it was a matter of firm and indubitable certainty with Solomon, and so should it be with us; one of those fundamental truths, one of those moral axioms, of which nothing should be allowed to shake our confident assurance:—"It shall be well with them that fear God." The fear of God is here, as it is very generally in the scriptures, put for the whole of true religion, both in its inward principles, and its outward practice,—both in the heart, and in the

life. “It shall be well with them,” *during life*; the favour and the blessing of God attending them amidst all its changes, soothing their sorrows, and heightening the relish of their joys, and making “all things to work together for their good.” “It shall be well with them,” *in death*:—“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the latter end of that man is peace:”—“The righteous hath hope in his death;” “good hope,” resting on a sure foundation, securing his mind against the agitations of foreboding fear, and enabling him to say, “O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?” “It shall be well with them,” *in the judgment*: for they shall stand with acceptance before the throne of God; they shall hear his voice address them in blessing, and shall instantly feel the sentence fulfilled in the commencement of unmingled and never-ending felicity.—“But it shall not be well with the wicked,”—either while he lives, or when he dies, or when he stands before the tribunal of God. Not while he lives; for even when he prospers, it is ill with him: the curse of Heaven is upon his tabernacle, and it secretly mingles itself with all his enjoyments. He is “cursed in the city, and cursed in the field; cursed in his basket and store; cursed in the fruit of his body, and the fruit of his land, in the increase of his kine, and the flocks of his sheep; cursed when he cometh in, and cursed when he goeth out.”—Not when he dies:—for he has then nothing before

him but “a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries:”—He shall be “driven away in his wickedness;” quitting in horror a world that has cheated and damned his soul: or if he should “have no bands in his death,” the more overwhelming will be the wretchedness of his disappointment, when he plunges into unanticipated wo.—Not when he appears before the judgment-seat,—for “the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; because the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

“Neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow.” The meaning is not, that he shall not live long. Many an ungodly man reaches and passes the limit of “threescore years and ten.” But his time of departure *must* come. It may be earlier or later. He may “do evil a hundred times and his days be prolonged.” But it cannot be always so. His days are still “as a shadow;” they pass successively away, and the last of them must quickly arrive. And when it does arrive, every wish for prolonged life will be vain. — He will not be able to command the addition of a single day, any more than to arrest “the shadow’s fleeting form.” Even when he is most anxious to live, the time may come for him to die:—when he anticipates most joyously a lengthened journey, he may reach the “bound which he cannot pass:”

—when his heart is beating highest with worldly expectation, its last pulse may be near at hand. And then “wickedness shall not deliver him that is given to it.” He “shall not prolong his days.” The shadow must pass. “His breath goeth forth; he returneth to his dust: in that very day, his thoughts perish.”

Although, however, there *is* a distinction, of which the Lord and Judge of all never loses sight, between the righteous and the wicked; yet, in the administration of Divine providence, *character* is not the measure for the distribution of temporal good. This is the sentiment expressed in the fourteenth verse:—“There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just (men) to whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked (men) to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous. I said, this also (is) vanity.”—The investigation of this mystery in the providence of God, (for it is of providence that Solomon evidently speaks,) we shall defer till our next lecture; the sentiment which is expressed in the verse now before us being enlarged upon in the beginning of the following chapter.—The matter of fact, I only observe at present, is now, as it was then, manifest to every observer. And well might it be denominated, in relation to the great design of this treatise, “a vanity.” Nothing could more strikingly show the vanity of the world, and the folly of excessive attachment to its pleasures,

or confidence in its possessions. For can any thing be more irrational, than to fix the heart on what it is impossible for us to secure, by any means, or by any course of conduct ; what is uncertain to the good as well as to the bad, and is neither exclusively connected, in the purpose and procedure of God, with righteousness nor with wickedness ; what is neither retained by the one, nor forfeited by the other ; what is neither a mark of Divine satisfaction, nor of Divine displeasure ; what may be given with a frown and taken away with a smile ; what the possession of may be a curse, and the loss of may be a blessing.—The very arrangement itself, besides, when viewed without relation to a future world, bears the aspect of vanity. It seems strange, unreasonable, unaccountable ; like the result of a vain and unsettled caprice, rather than of a wise and well-directed principle.

Verse 15. “ Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry ; for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.”

This may be understood in two ways, according to the *time* at which we suppose the commendation of mirth to have been uttered.—First, we might consider it as the libertine conclusion, drawn by Solomon, from the state of things here described, in the “ days of his vanity :”—as if he had said,—“ Seeing these things are so, let us indulge our-

selves. What better can we do, than to enjoy the world while it is in our power? Let us eat, and drink, and be merry; for the pleasure which a man has actually enjoyed is that alone which he can say with certainty is his own; that alone which he is sure shall abide with him of his labour; that alone of which he cannot be bereaved or disappointed.”—Or, secondly, we might interpret it as his serious inference, in the days of his returning wisdom, respecting the use which a man should make of worldly good, while God is pleased to bless him with the possession of it. In this case, “mirth” must be understood, not of licentious jollity, but of the cheerful enjoyment of the bounties of Heaven; and “eating and drinking,” of the happy and unsolicitous use of that portion of the world’s good which Divine kindness has bestowed. The measure of a man’s earthly prosperity, and of the success of his labour, is a matter of complete uncertainty: but a cheerful and contented spirit, disposed to *enjoy* whatever portion is sent, is a sure and constant blessing. The secret of happiness, as far as it depends on the things of time, is to enjoy prosperity cheerfully, and without the irksome and depressing apprehensions of an anxious mind, as long as it continues; and if it is lessened or withdrawn, still to receive our diminished and stinted supplies with the same cheerful and buoyant gratitude;—thus making the best of that, which, both in its degree and its continuance, is so prover-

bially uncertain.—Amidst all changes, this happy frame of spirit may be preserved. It is a “joy” with which “a stranger cannot intermeddle.” “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.” “He that is of a merry heart, hath a continual feast.”

In this view of the verse, it contains much the same sentiment as on different occasions has been already before us.* He does not mean, that the unrestrained enjoyment of temporal pleasures is the chief good. The whole tenor of his treatise belies such a supposition. Neither does he mean,—that even in the enjoyment of the things of this world, we are to be selfish, and to consult exclusively our own immediate gratification. This is not less inconsistent with the general spirit, and the express declarations of the book. His language is neither that of libertinism, nor of selfishness. It is the language of experienced discretion; of piety and practical wisdom;—recommending contented cheerfulness,—the thankful reception, and the free, unanxious, and lively enjoyment, of whatever portion of earthly things the providence of God may be pleased to bestow; as the only way of extracting from them such happiness as they are fitted to yield; the only way of at all redeeming them from the charge of utter “vanity and vexation of spirit.”

Verses 16, 17. “When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done

* Chap. ii. 24. iii. 12, 13. v. 18.

upon the earth ; [for also (there is that) neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes :] then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun ; because though a man labour to seek (it) out, yet shall he not find (it) ; yea, further, though a wise (man) seek to know (it), yet shall he not be able to find it.”

These verses express the difficulties which Solomon experienced, the inextricable perplexities in which he found himself involved, in one department especially of his researches after knowledge ; in observing the labours of men, in connection with the providence of God.—In the sixteenth verse, “ the business done under the sun ” refers to the toil and travail of mankind, in all its endless varieties. In contemplating these, he observed the mystery of providence. He saw that success was far from being uniformly proportioned to the measure of human diligence, solicitude, and skill. He saw many, “ rising early, and sitting late, and eating the bread of carefulness ; ” “ neither day nor night seeing sleep with their eyes,” through plodding eagerness for the acquisition of property, or anxious fears about its safety. And yet their days of toil, and nights of sleeplessness were vain ; success and security depending upon God : for “ except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it ; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh in vain.”—And then, the

procedure of God, in reference to the works and ways of men, was "a great deep;" full of mystery; to the eye of the human observer, appearing to be regulated by no fixed principles; no labour, no discretion, no character, affording any assurance of prosperity; but circumstances over which the sagacity of man could have no control, in innumerable instances, and at times in a manner the most marvellous and confounding, crossing the path, arresting the progress, and frustrating the purposes and hopes, of those who bade fairest for success; and giving that success to others, to whom no one supposed it possible, and who hardly, even in self-flattery, expected it themselves. All was wonder and perplexity,—beyond the penetration of the most profound observer, though applying to the subject the closest and most unwearied attention. "Though a man labour to seek (it) out, yet he shall not find (it); yea, further, though a wise (man) think to know (it), yet shall he not be able to find (it)." To every view he can take of "the work of God,"—to every hypothesis he can frame with regard to the principle of his providential government, difficulties present themselves, and exceptions and anomalies, which he cannot explain. The hypothesis that accounts satisfactorily for one event, seems to be contradicted by another; circumstances which to him appear to be similar, and to warrant similar expectations, terminating, not unfrequently, in opposite results; and on the con-

trary, trains of events, and courses of conduct the most unlike each other, sometimes conducting to the same issues; to riches, or to poverty,—to honour, or to shame.—That it is to the mystery of providence, in its superintendence over the affairs of men, over “all the business that is done under the sun,” that Solomon refers, will be very evident when we come to show, in next lecture, the connection between the end of this chapter and the beginning of the ninth; and the manner in which he there exemplifies and illustrates the sentiment he had here expressed.

In the mean time, observe, *in the first place*, from the verses that have now been expounded:—There are instances, in which the possession of power, authority, and dominion, dazzling as it may be to the imagination, is yet more to be *pitied* than *envied*.—It is so, surely, when a man “rules over others to his own hurt:” and every man thus rules, who perverts and abuses his power to the purposes of oppression and selfishness. The splendour of such power can be admired by fools alone. It is the splendour of a consuming fire, at which children may laugh and clap their hands with delight, reckless of the mischief it is spreading around, but which more thoughtful spectators will contemplate with grief and horror. The fire will at length devour him who has kindled it, and who exulted in its devastations. Perverted power will come back, with fearful recoil, upon its unprincipled perverter.

Whatever may be its present effects to the cruel oppressor, or the vainglorious ruler, it must, in the end, be "to his own hurt," when "the King of kings and Lord of lords," the Sovereign Judge of all, shall call him to his reckoning.—This shall be found especially true of the persecuting powers of this world, who have directed their violence against the church of God, and by sanguinary edicts, by bonds and imprisonments, by swords, and racks, and flames, have sought its extermination. The persecuted have been the compassionated party. They still are, when their sufferings are read in history. Yet the persecutors are infinitely more to be pitied than they. From the beginning until now, the voice of the blood which they have shed has "cried against them from the ground," and has "entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." The retributive justice of God has many a time, even in this world, given them blood to drink; in the cup which they have filled, filling to them double: and "true and righteous have been his judgments." And, oh! should they escape his vengeance here, what an account have they to give to Him who hath said of his people, the objects of his love, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye!"* The victims of their fury they have "chased up to heaven;" whilst for themselves, it will be found, they have been preparing a place in hell. Envy not, then, such power. Prefer being its victim to being

* Zech. ii. 8.

its possessor. Be burned at the stake, rather than kindle it. “The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot.” And how unenviable is the man, who on earth is execrated while remembered, and as soon as possible is forgotten, and whose crimes are registered in heaven, and kept from oblivion there, to cover him in the end with “shame and everlasting contempt?”

Secondly :—We have been considering the delay of punishment, the patience and forbearance of God; and we have illustrated a little the effect of this on human depravity,—the use that men actually make of it, as an encouragement to boldness in sin. Let me press a little upon your attention its proper and legitimate effect,—the use that men *ought* to make of it.

Instead of lulling in security, it ought to alarm;—instead of emboldening to sin, it should melt to penitential sorrow.

In the first place :—instead of lulling in security, it ought to alarm.—To make good this observation, I shall endeavour to show you, that the Divine forbearance and long-suffering, so far from being a proof that God thinks lightly of sin, affords convincing and impressive evidence of the contrary.

1.—First of all, we should recollect that by the patience of God there is no alteration produced in the *nature* of sin. There is in sin itself an intrinsic malignity that remains immutably the same. There is in it a contrariety to the holiness, an opposition to

the authority, an ingratitude for the unparalleled kindness, and an affront to the sacred majesty, of the infinite God,—as well as a universal wrong done by it to creation, whose happiness it tends to destroy,—that *must* render it, in all its kinds and in all its degrees, in all places and at all times, hateful in his sight. It is in the nature of things impossible, that He should ever look upon it with indifference. This should be a settled conviction in all our minds, and every thing that may *seem* opposed to it, we should rest perfectly assured, has nothing of inconsistency but the appearance.

2.—It does not at all follow that the provocation of Deity is small, because he does not instantly express it in action. His anger is not like that of his creatures. Men, when provoked by any injury done to them, are ready to kindle immediately into a transport of passion, and to indulge their resentment in word and in deed. But God is infinitely above being affected in this manner. He punishes sin, not from passion at the harm he sustains;—(for “if thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him?”)—but because it is right and necessary that sin should be punished. With a composure undisturbed by the swellings and out-breakings of human pride and impiety, unmoved by the scornful taunts, and bitter blasphemies, and daring outrages of the ungodly, he fixes his own time for “bringing it into judgment.” That time may

be distant. But O beware of fancying, because the execution of his anger is not immediate, the anger itself cannot be severe : for

3.—It is an evidence that it *is* severe, and that the expression of it at last will be the more aggravated.—What think you, is the *real* reason why God suspends the execution of his sentence, and “bears long” with the condemned offender? Hear Himself, in answer to the question :—“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn unto me, and live : turn ye, turn ye ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ?”—Now, why this solemnity of asseveration?—why this tenderness of persuasion?—why this energy of exposition and entreaty?—why does he lift up his hand to heaven, and add his oath to his word? Surely the death that the sinner must die can be no light or trivial evil, when the God of mercy and truth is thus in earnest in warning him against it. Why does He spare his offending creatures from day to day? Is it that he has pleasure in sin, or complacency in sinners? No. The reason is, that he knows the full measure of the sinfulness of sin, and knows the fearful nature of its eternal consequences. He waits to be gracious. He warns, he threatens, he entreats, by his word, and by his providence ; and his warnings, and threatenings, and entreaties, are all of them the utterance of mercy. Like a parent, when he has denounced a severe but

deserved punishment; a punishment that must be executed, if there is not repentance, humiliation, and confession:—in proportion to its severity, he lingers to inflict it; he tries every method he can think of, to gain his end without proceeding to extremities,—for “his bowels yearn over his son.” If we saw a parent thus delaying the stroke; exhausting all the arts of authority and love; his heart wrung with anguish, and still failing him when the moment of infliction approaches;—we should conclude, that the punishment thus suspended must be a heavy one. The same is the inference which men should draw from the long-suffering of God.

4.—Delay amongst men may lessen certainty, leaving room for escape, and for the loss of opportunity and ability to effect their threatenings.—But it cannot be so with God. We have seen how strongly this is affirmed in the verses we have been expounding. “Though the sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged,—yet surely it shall not be well with him.” “His judgment lingereth not; his damnation slumbereth not.” “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” And when sinners flatter themselves with their own delusions, and “say in their hearts, God will not require it,” their destruction, from being thus unanticipated, will only come upon them with the more overwhelming violence:—“When they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as

travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."

5.—In the very perversion and abuse itself of Divine forbearance, there is a fearful aggravation of criminality, which will be added to the guilt of every sin to which it has afforded encouragement, and will form a heavy addition to the general grounds of condemnation. Mark how the inspired apostle speaks of it. The disregard of God's goodness and long-suffering, is, according to him, nothing less, than a "treasuring up of wrath, against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."*

Let the patience of God, then, alarm you, "ye careless ones," instead of flattering and deceiving you. "Set not your hearts in you to do evil;" but rather "cease to do evil, and learn to do well."

I noticed, as a *second* legitimate effect of the suspension of vengeance, that it ought to *melt you to penitential sorrow*.—An act of unexpected clemency has sometimes, in human experience, had the effect of softening a heart, which all the terrors of judicial severity had been unable to move.—Let sinners, then, consider the following things:—

1.—God has *no personal interest to serve*, in sparing you.—A judge amongst men, after he has pronounced the sentence, may be afraid to inflict the punishment. The prisoner may be in circumstances that render it hazardous: or the judge may expect some advantage to himself from his lenity.

* Rom. ii. 5.

But with God there can be neither the fear of evil, nor the hope of good, from his offending creatures. In proportion as a criminal perceives that the clemency of his judge is either extorted by dread of consequences, or even by considerations of interest, it will fail to have upon him any subduing or melting influence: it will only inspire contempt. But, as the Supreme Judge is infinitely independent of his creatures, as his acts of clemency and of sparing mercy are entirely disinterested,—in no respect for his own, but all for the poor offender's sake; ought not his patient forbearance to melt the sinner to contrition, instead of hardening him in rebellion?—Say not, your continued transgression *can do HIM no harm*. It is most true. The infinite God sustain damage from a creature!—or be ultimately bereft of the smallest portion of his glory by a creature! It were blasphemy to suppose it. That is a gratification which neither the malignity of earth or hell can ever obtain. “If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or (if) thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thy hand? Thy wickedness (may hurt) a man as thou art; and thy righteousness (may profit) the son of man.” But ought not this very independence of Deity to convince you, that it is for your own sakes alone that he exercises towards you his forbearing clemency? And should not this give an overcoming power to his warnings, as the dictates of compassionate kindness?

2.—God is under *no obligation* to spare you;—no, not for a moment. He might in justice *now* cut you off; and he might have done it long since, and have consigned you to merited perdition. And what *justice* might have done, he has never wanted *power* to do. You are not spared because he cannot destroy you. He could, in one moment of time, sweep off into irremediable destruction every individual of his sinning creatures, and give existence to a new and better race, who should love, and fear, and serve, and honour him. But instead of this, he is pleased to call sinners to repentance, to invite them back to himself, to hold out to them, through the mediation of his Son, the sceptre of mercy, and to give them time to hear his voice, and to turn from their ways and live. O think, then,

3.—*What base ingratitude* there is, in abusing this wonderful, this unmerited, this free and disinterested kindness of God.—Nay, *ingratitude* is too gentle a term. There is not a word in language sufficiently strong to express the hellish malignity of such conduct, or to convey any adequate idea of its inexpressible odiousness.—What would you think of the man, who should derive encouragement from the very kindness of a benefactor, to neglect him and to do him injury?—What do you think of the unnatural child, whom the very tenderness of his father encourages to disobey and insult him? Yet this is what sinners do, when, from the merciful suspension of punishment,

their “hearts are set in them to do evil:” only that the obligations which they violate are infinitely higher. God is good and kind to them amidst all their rebellions: he sustains every moment the life which they are employing against himself. Yet instead of the thought of his goodness breaking and changing their hearts, the very experience they have had of it, and the hope of its continuance, are the considerations which cheer them on in their career of ungodliness. What think you of this?—of trying the patience of God further, *because* we have found it to be great!—of sinning against him with a high hand, *because* we know him to be “slow to anger!”—of blaspheming and insulting him, *because* he does not instantly revenge the insult and the blasphemy!—of hardening our spirits in impious opposition, *on account of* that very mercy which ought to soften, and conciliate, and subdue them!—of persisting to trample on his authority and laws, *because* he himself has assured us, that he is ready to forgive!—O, my friends, how unnatural, how monstrous is this! Surely the very thought, that you should have been guilty of any thing even approaching to it, should wring your hearts with the bitterness of shame and grief, should bring you to his feet in tears of penitential sorrow, and constrain you to give yourselves up henceforth to him from whom you have revolted, and with body, soul, and spirit, to serve him,—“redeeming the time.”

Let me conclude with a single word of admonition to Christians:—and it shall be conveyed in the language of their Lord himself. It is, to beware of the temptation which even to them the seeming delay of judgment presents;—a temptation to forgetfulness, to unbelief, to negligence, and to apostasy:—“ Watch, therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed (is) that servant whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite (his) fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for (him), and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint (him) his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

* Matt. xxiv. 42—51.

LECTURE XVII.

ECCLES. ix. 1—10.

- 1 *“For all this I considered in my heart, even to declare
all this, that the righteous and the wise, and their works,
(are) in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or*
2 *hatred (by) all (that is) before them. All (things come)
alike to all: (there is) one event to the righteous and to
the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the
unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacri-
ficeth not: as (is) the good, so (is) the sinner; (and) he*
3 *that sweareth, as (he) that feareth an oath. This (is) an
evil among all (things) that are done under the sun, that
(there is) one event unto all: yea, also, the heart of the
sons of men is full of evil, and madness (is) in their heart*
4 *while they live, and after that (they go) to the dead. For
to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a*
5 *living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living
know that they shall die: but the dead know not any
thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the*
6 *memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their
hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have
they any more a portion for ever in any (thing) that is*
7 *done under the sun. Go thy way, eat thy bread with
joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God*
8 *now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always*

- 9 *white ; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity : for that (is) thy portion in (this) life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.*
- 10 *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do (it) with thy might : for (there is) no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."*

IN the close of the former chapter, we found Solomon declaring the unsearchableness of "the work of God," or the conduct of his providence toward the children of men, even by the penetration of the acutest and most experienced minds. This he confirms by a reference to his own want of success in all his endeavours to fathom the mystery ; although he was one to whom God had given "wisdom and understanding, and largeness of heart, even as the sand on the sea-shore." He was earnestly desirous to have understood and explained it ; but after "considering in his heart" for this purpose, all that he could with certainty declare was, the existence of the fact, and the necessity of leaving all, with believing submission, in the hand of God :—"For all this I considered in my heart, even to declare all this,—that the righteous and the wise, and their works, (are) in the hand of God ;"—in the hand of Him who is infinitely just, infinitely wise, and infinitely good. Though his providence does present a mystery to our limited faculties, yet he is not forgetful of those who fear him. They

and their works are neither unknown, nor unregarded : and he will one day make it fully manifest, that his whole procedure has perfectly accorded with his character, as “the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness, and whose countenance be- holdeth the upright.” They themselves are under his special and unremitting care :—his eye is ever upon them ; his ear is open to their cry :—and “their works” are remembered by him for good. “They that feared the Lord spake often one to another ; and the Lord hearkened and heard ; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked ; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.”*

But, however confident we may be of this distinction being ever present to the Divine mind, yet, in the general administration of Providence in the distribution of temporal good and evil, it often seems as if it were forgotten ; so that, as it is here expressed, “no man knoweth either love or hatred (by) all (that is) before them.” As there is no description or degree of temporal prosperity with which wicked men are not favoured, and hardly

* Mal. iii. 16—18.

any kind or measure of adversity to which good men are not at times subjected, no man can discover, from his external condition merely, the state of the Divine affection towards him, whether he be an object of the love of God, or of the contrary; the good and the evil of life coming alternately in the lot of all,—the gourd of earthly comfort flourishing one day and blasted the next, in the experience of men of every description of character.—This sentiment is more fully brought out, in

Verse 2. “All (things come) alike to all; (there is) one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as (is) the good, so (is) the sinner; (and) he that sweareth, as (he) that feareth an oath.”

“The *clean*,” are evidently those who were not merely attentive to keep themselves free from ceremonial pollution, but who were “pure in heart,” renewed and sanctified in the spirit of their minds; and “the *unclean*,” those who were destitute of this inward purity, and who might, at the same time, show their disregard of God, by carelessness about the contraction or the removal of legal defilement.—By “him who sacrificeth, and him who sacrificeth not,” we understand, the man, on the one hand, who is conscientious and regular in the discharge of religious duties, and, on the other, the man who entirely neglects them, and lives “with-

out God in the world ;”—the pious worshipper, and the atheistical despiser of all devotion.—“ (There is) one event,” says Solomon, to these opposite characters :—one event, *in life* ; “ all (things),” with regard to the measure of prosperity and adversity, of the cares and joys, the hopes and fears, the gratifications and disappointments of life, “ coming alike to all :”—one event *in death* ;—not indeed as to its solemn and eternal consequences, nor even as to the state of mind with which its approach is anticipated, and its arrival met ; but as to all the external circumstances and corporeal effects of it ; no distemper coming upon the wicked (with the exception indeed of those which are the immediate product of particular vices) to which the righteous are not also liable ; no degree of pain or of any attendant evils afflicting the one, which may not likewise distress the other ; and no loathsome taint of corruption invading the body of the one, that does not equally prey upon and consume that of the other.—In these respects, “ as is the good, so is the sinner, and he that sweareth, as (he) that feareth an oath.”—“ Swearing,” being here opposed to “ fearing an oath,” must of course mean swearing *lightly* and *falsely* ; and “ fearing an oath ” is taking it with solemnity, and keeping it with fidelity, under a deep impression of the evil of profaning the great and dreadful name to which the appeal is made. In such a connection, the fear of an oath is the fear of God : “ Thou shalt *fear the Lord thy God* ;

him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and *swear by his Name.*”*

Such being the state of the fact, as to the providential allotments of temporal good and evil, the observation of it has at times proved a strong and distressing temptation to the children of God, to doubt and question the reality of his superintendence over the affairs of men. Such a state of temptation Asaph affectingly describes in the seventy-third Psalm. His “feet were almost gone,” his “steps had well nigh slipped:” for he was “envious at the foolish, (when) he saw the prosperity of the wicked.” He had not merely observed an indiscriminate mixture in the lot of good and evil men, but in some instances which had come particularly under his notice, there was a great preponderance of prosperity on the side of the latter. Theirs was a cup of rich and almost unmingled sweetness, whilst a full cup of bitterness was “wrung out” for the other. And over these unaccountable anomalies, as they seemed to him to be, he brooded in agonizing perplexity of spirit, till his mind was giving way to scepticism, and drawing to the very borders of apostasy and atheism. He said, “How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?”—The prophet Jeremiah, if not tempted as Asaph was, yet expresses a similar feeling of difficulty and wonder: —“Righteous (art) thou, O Lord, when I plead

* Deut. x. 20.

with thee; (yet) let me talk with thee of (thy) judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? (wherefore) are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them; yea, they have taken root: they grow; yea, they bring forth fruit: thou (art) near in their mouth, and far from their reins.”*

Whilst the Divine procedure has thus perplexed and tempted the minds of God’s people, it has, on the contrary, been abused by his enemies as an encouragement to perseverance in sin. “They say unto God,” in the midst of their prosperity, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What (is) the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?”†

This appears to be the sentiment expressed in the latter part of the following verse:

Verse 3. “This (is) an evil, among all (things) that are done under the sun, that (there is) one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men (is) full of evil, and madness (is) in their heart while they live; and after that (they go) to the dead.”

The heart of the sons of men is *by nature* full of evil. It is “enmity against God.” Its “imaginations are only evil continually.” It is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Out of it “proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications,

* Jer. xii. 1, 2.

† Job xxi. 14, 15. with the preceding context.

murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.” That must be a fearfully polluted fountain from which there flow so many foul and tainted streams.—Natural conscience, though partaking of the corruption of the fall, and very deficient and partial, very treacherous and false, in the discharge of its function, has yet an effect far from inconsiderable, along with the apprehension of punishment which it inspires, in restraining from the commission of iniquity, even men who have no true fear of God before their eyes. But prosperity in sin tends to dissolve even this restraint; it hardens the heart, it stifles the voice of conscience, it silences the suggestions of fear, and drives a man on to a frantic wildness in the gratification of his passions and desires:—“madness is in their heart while they live.”

Every act of sin, being an act of rebellion against the infinite God, is an act of madness; of infatuated, and impotent, and self-destroying phrenzy:—for “who hath hardened himself against him, and” finally “prospered?”—All worldliness of spirit, being a preference, in affection and pursuit, of temporal to eternal things, is madness; far beyond the derangement of the maniac who throws away gold for stones, and prefers straws to pearls and jewels. But the expression “madness is in their heart,” appears from the connection rather to mean that wild and unthinking boldness, that forwardness, and

hardihood, and licentious extravagance in sin, which arises from a course of prosperity in it, and from the seeming distance of the evil day. “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek (after God): God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments (are) far above out of his sight: (as for) all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved; for (I shall) never (be) in adversity.”*—“How much she hath glorified herself and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.”†

How awful is the thought!—“madness is in their heart *while they live*.” Intoxicated by success in sin, they persist in it to the last; casting off the fear of God, and “mad upon their idols:”—and then—“after that they go to the dead!” “The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it:”—or rather, while their bodies are laid in the grave, to be food for the worm of corruption, their souls depart to the “place of torment,” to join the “spirits in prison,” even all the wicked dead who had left the world before them!—Such is their melancholy end; and then all is over with them;—settled for ever;—their time of mercy gone:—they are beyond the reach of hope:

Verse 4. “For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope:”—either, hope in adverse times

* Psal. x. 4—6.

† Rev. xviii. 7.

of better days to come ; or rather, as the connection intimates, hope with respect to his future state, —his state after death.—“ For a living dog is better than a dead lion ;” that is, the meanest living is better than the noblest dead. The dog was not only an unclean animal by the Mosaic law, but, being greatly despised amongst the Jews, was often used as the emblem of what was despicable and worthless. Of all appellations that of a *dead dog* was the most contemptuous ; and a living dog was not much better.*—The lion again is the noblest of the beasts of the forest ; mighty, majestic, royal ; he “ turns not away for any.”—The meanest living man possesses a superiority over the mightiest dead, in having life itself, and power, and consciousness, and feeling, and enjoyment ; which with regard to the dead, viewed in their relation to this world, are all at an end ; and equally at an end, whatever their power and eminence while they lived. The carcase of the “ king of beasts” may be carrion to the vilest and most worthless dog that breathes. The lowest and

* See 1 Sam. xxiv. 14. 2 Psalm ix. 8. 2 Kings viii. 13. In this last passage, Hazael’s exclamation of surprise should probably be rendered, “ But what is thy servant—a mere dog—that he should do this great thing ?” It is not the *vileness*, but the *greatness* of the thing he speaks of : and it does not seem to be *indignation* he expresses, at being supposed to possess *dispositions* for so *base* and *odious* a work ; but *astonishment* that one so *mean* and of so *little account* as he affects to call himself, should be deemed *competent* to achieve so *mighty* a work. It is not with horror he startles, according to the common view of his words, like one unconscious at the time of the propensities of his character, and not believing himself capable of such enormities :—it is rather the start of an agreeable surprise ; though he covers, by an affected humility, the secret pleasure of an aspiring ambition.

most despised subject the king of Assyria had was in these respects superior to his fallen master, when “his pomp was brought down to the grave, and the noise of his viols, when the worm was spread under him, and the worm covered him.” The most abject wretch might then stand on his tomb, and say, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, that didst weaken the nations!” He might stamp over his ashes, and insult his name:—no ear startles at the sound; no eye kindles; no hand stirs to grasp the avenging blade:—all is still and motionless:—“there is no voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regardeth.”

The description, in the third verse, of the “sons of men” shows, that under that designation Solomon does not include those whose hearts have been changed by Divine grace, who have been “delivered from this present evil world,” but the mass of mankind in general, that part of the race which has ever, alas! been the great majority, who “walk after their own lusts,” following the tendencies of their fallen nature.—“To him that is joined to all the living, there is hope.” I might have conceived this to express the encouragement which wicked men derive from hope to perseverance in their evil courses, and even in their maddest indulgences; and “a living dog is better than a dead lion,” to mean the unthinking exultation of such

men in the continued possession of life ; their impious vaunting that death has not yet made *them* his prey ; and their high-spirited determination to avail themselves of life while they have it. But the connection of the following verses inclines me to a different sense :—

Verses 5, 6. “ For the living know that they shall die ; but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward ; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished ; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any (thing) that is done under the sun.”

Whatever encouragement to sin the wicked might derive from their hopes of prolonged life, and even from their illusory promises to themselves of impunity beyond the grave, it is evident they could derive none from “ knowing that they must die ;”—unless indeed the limitation of their time might be an excitement to them,—an unhallowed excitement,—to make the most of it ; to drink as largely as they may of the cup of pleasure, ere the hand of Death dash it from their lips :—and this is accordingly one of the favourite themes in “ the song of fools,” in their hours of jovial revelry.—I am disposed to think, however, that Solomon uses the words more seriously. “ To him that is joined to all the living there is hope :—for the living know that they must die.” To them, death is yet

to come. The solemn prospect is still before them; a prospect which *must* be realized, and they know not when. Till the event has taken place, we cannot pronounce on their future doom. While there is life, there is hope. They may consider their ways. They may turn to the Lord. They may be prepared for their latter end, and for meeting their God. But when once the dissolution of soul and body has taken place,—all is over; life is gone, and hope with it.

A variety of humbling and affecting views are then set before us, of the termination of the earthly career of wicked and worldly men.

First. Of all that engaged and interested their attention while they lived, their knowledge is at an end. Their acquaintance with every thing on earth has closed :—"the dead know not any thing." We can impart to them no intelligence of what is doing and of what is passing here. And what is of infinitely weightier moment, we can no more communicate to their ear the tidings of mercy, the knowledge that "maketh wise unto salvation." "Wisdom at" every "entrance" is now "quite shut out."

Secondly. "They have had their reward." Thus Jesus speaks of those who valued and courted the praise of men, rather than the praise of God. And thus Solomon here speaks of such as have laboured after this world; have "laid up for themselves

treasures upon earth ;” have pursued pleasure, or wealth, or power, or glory, as their chief good ; have continued to live in carelessness and sin ;—“ neither,” says he, “ have they *any more* a reward :” that is, they have already had it. And when they have plunged themselves into irremediable despair, it will be said to each of them, contrasting their state with that of the poorest and most despised and afflicted of God’s children, “ Son, remember, that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now, he is comforted, and thou art tormented.”*

Thirdly. They have not even *posthumous fame*.—Whilst their reward on earth is at an end, and their sufferings in the other world are commenced, never to terminate ; “ the memory of them is forgotten.”—“ As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more.” We had the same circumstance particularized in the preceding chapter :—“ I saw the wicked buried, that had come and gone from the place of the holy ; and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done.”

Fourthly. They are utterly *impotent* ; they have no power whatever remaining, either to profit or to

* Luke xvi. 25.

hurt, and are neither courted for the one, nor feared for the other. This seems to be the idea chiefly intended by their “love and their hatred and their envy having now perished.” Their power to benefit and to injure is alike gone. The objects of their love can derive from it no advantage, nor can the victims of their hatred and envy sustain from them any damage. While they lived, their favour might be courted, and its effects desired; their displeasure deprecated, their hatred and envy dreaded, and the consequences of them anxiously shunned. But their mere names have no charm either of blessing or of curse. The ashes of the grave can do neither evil nor good. “There the wicked cease from troubling.” “Put not your trust in princes, (nor) in the son of man, in whom (there is) no help. His breath goeth forth; he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.”*

Lastly. Their portion of enjoyment, such as it was, is gone *for ever*. They “had their portion in this life;”† and when this life comes to a close, it is necessarily lost:—“neither have they any more a portion for ever in any (thing) that is done under the sun.” While they lived, they had a portion in their own labours under the sun; but now, others are entered into their labours, reaping the fruits of them, and striving to add to them. These occupants shall be followed by others. But they them-

* Job iii. 17. Psal. cxlvi. 3, 4.

† Psal. xvii. 14.

selves shall never return to their place. Death is not a temporary absence, but an eternal adieu. And if this world be a man's portion, when he dies it is for ever gone.

Thus the conclusion to which Solomon comes, and his solution of the difficulty arising from the prosperity of the wicked, are very similar to those of Asaph:—"When I thought to know this, it (was) too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; (then) understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places, thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they (brought) into desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when (one) awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish (was) I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I (am) continually with thee: thou hast holden (me) by my right hand."* And as the Psalmist, returning to a right mind, restored to confidence in God, delights himself anew in his love and mercy, saying, in the spirit of self-devotion, "Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven (but thee)? and (there is) none upon earth (whom) I desire in comparison of thee: my flesh and my heart fail, (but)

* Psal. lxxiii. 16—23.

God (is) the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever :”*—so Solomon here, addressing himself to the children of God, exhorts them to the exercise of trust and joy :—

Verse 7. “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart ; for God now accepteth thy works.”—Let thy mind be fully assured, notwithstanding all the appearances of the contrary that have disquieted thy spirit, that “the Lord loveth the righteous.” Go thy way ; be cheerful and happy.

The description of the conduct of the first Christians, in the Acts of the Apostles, affords a fine exemplification of what Solomon means in this verse :—“Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.”†—The same kind of joy is described in these words with that recommended in the passage before us. It is the gladness of heart that springs from a sense of the Divine favour ; from the lifting up of the light of God’s countenance.

“God *now* accepteth thy works :”—yes—even now, in the midst of all these difficulties and perplexing appearances :—let not these shake and unsettle your mind :—even now, he “loveth right-

* Psal. lxxiii. 24—26.

† Acts ii. 46, 47.

eousness, and his countenance beholdeth the upright:”—he regards their works, the fruits of faith and love, with approving complacency; and he will at last, before assembled worlds, manifest at once his delight in his people, and his hatred of the workers of iniquity.—Therefore,

Verse 8. “Let thy garments be always white, and let thy head lack no ointment.”

White garments were worn on occasions of festive joy. Isaiah speaks of the “garment of praise” being given to “them that mourn in Zion,” instead of “the spirit of heaviness;”* and perhaps the joy of the saints in heaven is intended, as well as their justification and purity, by their being “clothed in white raiment.” This idea is especially countenanced by one passage, where, besides being “clothed with white robes,” they are represented as having “palms in their hands,”—the palms of victory and triumph,—and as “crying with a loud voice,”—the voice surely of exulting gladness,—“Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!”†

Anointing with oil, and with fragrant ointments, was also a customary practice, to which there are various allusions in other parts of scripture. It was not only performed as a rite of official consecration; it was one of the daily ceremonies of the dressing chamber, and of preparation for appearing

* Isa. lxi. 3.

† Rev. iii. 4, 5. vii. 9, 10.

abroad; and it was particularly attended to on occasions of personal, domestic, or public rejoicing. Hence we read of the mourners in Zion receiving “the *oil of joy* for mourning;”* and of the blessed Messiah being “anointed with the *oil of gladness*, above his fellows.”—“Thou hast anointed my head with oil,” says the Psalmist David, “my cup runneth over.”† “My horn shalt thou exalt like (the horn of) a unicorn; I shall be anointed with fresh oil.”‡ When Joab sent the woman of Tekoah to king David, he said to her, “Feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on mourning apparel, and *anoint not thyself with oil*, but be as a woman that had a long time mourned for the dead.”§ Daniel’s real mourning was expressed in the same way. He “ate no pleasant bread, neither did flesh nor wine come into his mouth, neither did he *anoint himself* at all:”|| and in warning against ostentatious hypocrisy, Christ says, “But thou, when thou fastest, *anoint thy head*, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret.”¶ The miraculous healing of the sick was in many instances accompanied with “anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord;” and the sacred influences of the Spirit of grace are denominated “an unction from the Holy One.”—The notion of *pleasure* thus seems invariably asso-

* Isa. lxi. 3. † Psal. xxiii. 5. ‡ Ibid. xcii. 10. § 2 Sam. xiv. 2.

|| Dan. x. 3.

¶ Matt. vi. 17.

ciated with the practice ; and it was aptly indicated by the richness and freshness, and, in many cases, by the aromatic fragrance, of the balsamic unguents. —“ Let thy head lack no ointment ” is equivalent to—Rejoice in the bounty and loving-kindness of the Lord ; “ let not thy heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” And the expression “ let thy garments be *always* white ” is of the same amount with the apostolic exhortation, “ Rejoice evermore ! ” Take the enjoyment of whatever the hand of a kind providence bestows, with a grateful and cheerful spirit ;—not with selfishness or extravagance, or thoughtless mirth ; but with benevolence and sobriety, and with that true joy which is independent of the possessions of time, which, coming from above, infuses into the things of earth a relish of heaven, and would continue to be the inmate of the pious soul, though they were all removed.

Verse 9. “ Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity ; for that (is) thy portion in (this) life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.”

How sadly does Solomon, in these words, condemn his own practice ! He commends marriage, in the form in which it existed from the beginning, as a source of genuine happiness, the sweetest that earth can furnish ; but he warns against such de-

partures from its original institution, as he had himself known, by bitter experience, to frustrate the kind intentions of Heaven in its appointment. —“ Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest,” —the one object of thy undivided affections, with whom thou hast plighted mutual faith, and who has given thee her heart in return for thine. It is only in this way that conjugal and domestic felicity, the purest and richest of temporal delights, and the dearest earthly solace of this valley of tears, can be effectually enjoyed. It is the will of God, intimated in nature by the numerical proportion of the sexes, and explicitly declared in his word, that “ every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband.” This was the first and permanent law, when God, in the beginning “ made a male and a female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.” It were out of place to enlarge on the advantages, both to the parties themselves and to their offspring, of adherence to this arrangement. All recorded experience is in favour of it; and how could it be otherwise? Not only did such flagrant transgressors as Solomon make themselves miserable by the violation of it. Look even to patriarchal times. The quarrels of Sarah and Hagar, were a grief to Abraham; his grandson Jacob was vexed by those of Rachel and Leah; whilst Isaac, although not without sources

of trial, (for who is, or who can be, in this world of sin?) yet appears, in this particular, to have lived a life of harmonious and tranquil happiness with his heaven-sent and loved Rebekah.

But our joy in the dearest relations, as well as in all the possessions of life, is to be maintained in the remembrance that our days are vanity:—"Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity."—The most intimate and endearing connections, the springs of our most exquisite enjoyment, are necessarily but temporary. Every marriage should be formed in the recollection, that sooner or later it must leave a widow or a widower. And blessed are they, whom the remembrance of the vanity of life does not deprive of the relish of its joys!—"For that (is) thy portion in (this) life;" these sources of happiness, both personal and social, are given thee to be enjoyed, as thine allotted measure of this world's good, while this frail and mortal life continues:—"and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun;"—they are at once the fruit of thy labour, through the smile and blessing of heaven upon the work of thy hands, and they are the cheering solace of thy labour, amidst all its fatigues and its occasional disappointments and difficulties. The mode of expression in this verse remarkably accords with the apostle's admonition, to remember the shortness of time both in its joys and its woes:

“ But this I say, brethren, the time (is) short : it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not abusing (it) : for the fashion of this world passeth away.”*

There is a connection between the exhortation in this verse to *joy*, and that in the tenth to *active diligence*, founded on the principle so finely expressed by Nehemiah to the Israelites :—“ Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared ; for (this) day (is) holy unto our Lord : neither be ye sorry, for *the joy of the Lord is your strength*.”† —Verse 10. “ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do (it) with thy might : for (there is) no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”

Dejection and melancholy unbrace all the sinews of exertion. They make the hands to hang down, and the knees to become feeble. When the mind is under their influence, nothing, either of a temporal or spiritual nature, can be done with energy and effect. All is spiritless and inefficient. Whereas, when the heart is light, when the spirits are buoyant and cheerful, the whole man, in all his powers, is prompt and vigorous for duty :

* 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

† Neh. viii. 10.

“whatever the hand finds to do is done with might.”

I need not say, that whatever we are admonished thus to do, must be in its nature “lawful and right.” The hand may find to do what God has forbidden. But this, instead of being done with might, must not be done at all.—The exhortation may be extended to *all duty*, whether in reference to ourselves, to others, or to God. In compliance with it, the child of God will not be “slothful in business,” but set an example of active industry, “working with his hands the thing which is good;” that he may “walk honestly toward them that are without;” that he may “have lack of nothing;” and that he may “have to give to him that needeth.” In compliance with it, he will “work out his own salvation with fear and trembling,” in the spirited and unremitting use of the means of establishment and growth in grace; “giving diligence to make his calling and election sure,” by “adding to his faith, fortitude; and to fortitude, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity.” In compliance with it, he will give himself, with constant and persevering energy, to those works which have for their objects the glory of God and the good of men, both in their temporal and eternal interests,—the works of *piety* and *benevolence*. It is probably to these that the exhorta-

tion chiefly points. Whatever opportunities God gives thee in his providence, for promoting his own glory, and for advancing the present and the everlasting well-being of thy fellow-creatures, embrace them with eagerness; apply to them all thy bodily and mental energies; persevere in them with unre-laxing ardour. Do all "heartily, as to the Lord and not to men:"—"do it *with thy might*," exerting thyself, like a person who has much to do, and who knows not how little time he may have to do it.

Such is the reason given for the admonition:—"for (there is) no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."—Thou art travelling to the tomb. Every moment brings thee nearer to it; and every moment may terminate thy journey. And when thou hast arrived at "the house appointed for all living,"—"there is no *work*" there; active power is gone: there is no "*device*;" no scheme can be either planned or executed there: there is no "*knowledge*" of what passes on the earth amongst surviving men: and there is no "*wisdom*;" that which was unemployed in life, can there be no longer applied to use.—In fulfilling the admonition of this verse, we imitate the example of Him whose disciples and followers we call ourselves; for his language, expressing the principle on which he acted every day, every hour, every moment of his life, is in the full spirit of it:—"I must work the works

of Him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.”*

These verses suggest the following reflections.

In the first place. There are some truths, in the faith of which we ought at all times to be firmly established, and of which we should not allow our conviction to be readily shaken by apparent difficulties. Of this description especially are those which respect the existence and perfections of Deity. Every thing derogatory to his essential excellence, every thing of the nature of imputation against any of his necessary moral attributes, we should unhesitatingly and with abhorrence reject. Difficulties in the Divine administration we might well expect to find. But let nothing of this kind ever shake our conviction that he is righteous, and that he “loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity.” It is surely much more reasonable, more accordant both with soundness of judgment and with lowliness of heart, to conclude, that whatever appears opposite to this is opposite in appearance only, and that the difficulty arises entirely from our short-sightedness and limited knowledge.—“Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.”

Secondly. In the full confidence of this, let the people of God “rejoice in tribulation.” The design of their heavenly Father, in all their trials, is in perfect harmony with the assurances of his pater-

* John ix. 4.

nal love. His discipline is one of the expressions of that love. He would be neither faithful nor kind, were he to withhold it, when, in his infinite wisdom, he perceives it to be necessary for their spiritual benefit. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction; for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." "We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected (us), and we gave (them) reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily, for a few days chastened (us) after their pleasure, but he for (our) profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."* Be assured of this all-merciful intention under the severest strokes of his hand, and even although you should appear to be selected for suffering, whilst the ungodly around you are enjoying prosperity. Be not startled nor stumbled at this; but look, in the exercise of faith, for present and ultimate good from all that you are called to endure. Imitate Moses, in "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Repress the risings of a foolish and criminal envy. Rejoice in hope. "The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold, that perisheth though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Cleave

* Prov. iii. 11, 12. Heb. xii. 9, 10.

to the Lord with purpose of heart. Bow to his sovereignty; yield to his wisdom; rely on his faithfulness; rejoice in his love; be strong in his strength. His grace is sufficient for you, and will "keep you through faith unto salvation." "What shall we then say to these things? If God (be) for us, who (can be) against us? He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not, with him, also freely give us all things? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Shall) tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.] Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Thirdly. Let the ungodly and worldly man beware of interpreting his earthly prosperity, however great and however constant, into a token of Divine favour and approbation, or an evidence that God never will call him to "give an account of his stewardship." This is a miserable delusion; a

* Rom. viii. 31, 32, 35—39.

fearful abuse of the providence of God. O flatter not yourselves, as if the God who permits you to prosper, the kind and indulgent Author of all your undeserved and ill-requited blessings, approves or thinks lightly of your sins. He hates them; and he *will* punish them. “He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him.” Let not that be your encouragement to continued disregard of God, which ought to melt you to penitence, and to win your heart to gratitude and love. Let not your prosperity thus be your ruin. It is “the prosperity of *fools* that destroys them.” If, lulled by such a delusion, you persist in forgetting God, and are only waked by the summons to judgment,—wo is me for you! As the righteous may be assured of the favour of God, you may, with equal certainty, be assured of his holy displeasure; and well may you tremble for its consequences. “Say unto the wicked, It shall be ill with him.” “When the wicked spring as the grass, and all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.” “The wrath of God,” which is “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,” rests upon them amidst all their prosperity, and shall abide upon them for ever;—the wrath of a holy, just, almighty, and immutable God. They “spring” and “flourish:” but they are not “trees of righteousness, the planting of

the Lord, in which he is glorified ;” and “ every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

Fourthly. In forming our estimate of the comparative happiness of different descriptions of men, we should take into our account the whole extent of their existence, and not merely this transitory life.—It is passing strange, that any who profess to believe in the immortality of man should ever overlook this self-evident principle. It is peculiarly wonderful, that it should, on any occasion, escape the recollection of those who have themselves been taught of God to “ look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” Yet it was forgetfulness of this that constituted the main error of Asaph, when he was envious at the prosperity of the wicked ; and it was by being reminded of it, that his spirit was set at liberty from the bondage of temptation.—It was the saying of an ancient philosopher, that no man should be pronounced happy till after his death ; by which he intended to express the extreme uncertainty of earthly enjoyments, and the impossibility of knowing how soon the sunshine of prosperity might be overcast, and how long and how deep might be the subsequent gloom :—how quickly the cup of sweets might be dashed from the lips, and a bitter cup succeed it, so full and so nauseous, as to make the sweet be all forgotten. But the word of God teaches us to go still further ; not only to suspend

our sentence of happiness or misery till the earthly course has been finished, but to look beyond its close, into the eternity that follows it. It would be very foolish to pronounce a man happy in this world, on account of one day's enjoyment, succeeded by threescore years of severe, unintermitted, and unmitigated suffering. It were more foolish, in the proportion of everlasting existence to the short period of human life, to call him a happy man, who should enjoy throughout the threescore years all that this world could possibly furnish, and then sink into an eternity of wo. So mighty is the disproportion between the present and the future part of man's existence, that we cannot be said to have estimated his happiness at all, if we have left the latter out of our calculation. For the lives of all mankind together bear no proportion to eternity. They are not to it what the twinkling of an eye is to the life of Methuselah.—We are not required to prefer the temporal situation of Lazarus, to that of the rich man. But who, in the possession of a sound understanding, would hesitate to prefer the character and entire existence of the one to the character and entire existence of the other? Who would not prefer the poverty, and sores, and squalid wretchedness of the beggar, followed by an endless duration of bliss, to the riches, and health, and finery, and sumptuous fare of his lordly superior, succeeded by everlasting torment in the “fire that never shall be quenched?”

Fifthly. Let the precariousness of the tenure by which life is held, along with the decisiveness of death, in for ever terminating all connection with the concerns of time, and fixing irreversibly the future state, warn the ungodly, the careless, the worldly, to seek a more durable portion than any they can possess here, and to flee in time for refuge from the coming wrath.—What a sad thing will it be, my friends, should it be said at last of any one of you, He has had his reward!—"To him that is joined to all the living there is hope." Improve, then, the time of your merciful visitation. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." For when a man has been "joined to the dead," if he has lived and died in his sins, hope is at an end. His sentence is sealed; and the seal can never be broken. From the prison of hell he can never return to this world; and between it and the abodes of the blessed there is fixed a great and impassable gulph; across which no sounds of mercy, no tidings of salvation, no proclamations of pardon, reach his ear. "Hope never comes, that comes to all."

As there is hope for all that are "joined to the living," we are encouraged to announce and recommend to all that live, the mercy offered by the gospel to sinners through the one Mediator. But still remember, words cannot express the uncertainty of life. To some of you, this may be your last warning. To-morrow may disjoin you from

the living, and settle your eternal doom. O look now, then, unto Jesus. Defer not reflection to a day that may never be yours. "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die!"

Lastly. Let Christians recommend religion by displaying its cheerful influence.—It is an article of your creed, that the discoveries of the gospel are "good tidings of great joy," and that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness." Let not your deportment belie your professed belief. Are you to show yourselves believers of glad tidings, by "hanging your heads like a bulrush, and spreading sackcloth and ashes under you?" by a countenance never lighted up with a smile? by nothing but sighs, and tears, and groans? Is it not the precept of God, intimating at once your duty and your privilege, "Rejoice evermore?" Light is the emblem of knowledge, and purity, and joy; and in all its three emblematic senses, Christians are "children of light." "Come then, O house of Jacob, and walk in the light of the Lord." Truly *this* light is sweet. Present to all around you a just and inviting view of your religion. "Lie not against the truth," by leading every one that looks you in the face to fancy it a system of inveterate and incurable melancholy. There is a wide distance between cheerfulness and levity; between the tranquil yet animated gladness of the believing soul, and the frothy and transient mirth of the fool. Religion is at an equal distance from unbe-

coming frivolity and sullen moroseness. It is the day-light of the soul. Let it appear in its true character. Let it infuse its cheering influence into your enjoyment of all your earthly blessings. "Eat thy meat with gladness, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; and live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest."—And not only so; but, animated by the faith of the Divine promises, and by the blessed prospects that are before you, "rejoice in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in your hearts, by the Holy Spirit given unto you."*

* Rom. v. 3—5.

LECTURE XVIII.

ECCLES. ix. 11—18.

- 11 “ *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race (is) not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill ; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time :*
- 12 *as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds (that are) caught in the snare ; so (are) the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon*
- 13 *them. This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and*
- 14 *it (seemed) great unto me : (there was) a little city, and few men within it ; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it.*
- 15 *Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city ; yet no man remembered*
- 16 *that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom (is) better than strength : nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom (is)*
- 17 *despised, and his words are not heard. The words of wise (men are) heard in quiet, more than the cry of him*
- 18 *that ruleth among fools. Wisdom (is) better than weapons of war : but one sinner destroyeth much good.”*

HAVING, in the preceding part of the chapter, stated the fact of the indiscriminate distribution of temporal good and evil in the administration of

providence, and having drawn from it the reflections and practical lessons which it suggested ; the wise man returns to the further examination of the same subject, or at least of one very closely connected with it in the Divine procedure :—

Verse 11. “I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race (is) not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill ; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”

This verse has not only a connection with the general subject of the preceding passage, but a more immediate relation to verse 10. In it he exhorts to the application of vigorous diligence in “whatever our hand findeth to do.” Here he suggests a caution against a too sanguine confidence of success, after the exertion of all our ability and all our skill. Different characters are prone to opposite extremes. Some are so timid and diffident, that they will hardly undertake or exert themselves in any thing, from the apprehension of failure. Others are so dauntless and ardent, that failure hardly ever enters into their calculations. The former are in danger of losing opportunities both of doing and of obtaining good. They stand in need of excitement. The admonition of the tenth verse requires to be pressed upon their practical regard ; that they may not become the victims of inactivity and sloth. The latter are

in danger of precipitation and extravagance, and, by their high undoubting assurance of success, of preparing for themselves the bitterness of disappointment. They need the counsels of humility and dependence. The lesson of the eleventh verse must be urged upon their notice ; a lesson, of which the truth must be obvious to every attentive observer of human affairs :—" The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill ; but time and chance happeneth to them all."

We very naturally expect, that the lightest of foot should always get first to the goal, and win the prize ; that in battle, the most numerous and well-appointed and powerful army should uniformly be victorious ; that the man of intelligence and prudence in business should never fail to make rich ; that he who courts favour and popularity, by skilful and well-devised arts, should invariably succeed in gaining the good graces of his fellow-men. —But experience frequently contradicts our expectations. The man who is " swift of foot as a wild roe" may trip and stumble, or by some untoward accident be thrown behind his less fleet competitor. Innumerable are the circumstances that affect what is called the fortune of war,—the chance of battle,—so that at times a hundred may put ten thousand to flight. The most intelligent and prudent do, not unfrequently, with all their application and

care, fail of getting forward in the world, riches seeming unaccountably to elude their grasp. And the most insinuating and skilful courtier defeats sometimes his own purposes, or is thwarted by occurrences which he could not control, and becomes the most unpopular of men.

We are not to conclude from this, that there is no adaptation of means to ends,—no tendency in these qualities to the desired event, more than in their opposites;—that there is no superior probability of success to the swift more than to the slow, to the strong more than to the weak, to the intelligent more than to the ignorant, to the skilful more than to the foolish. Far from it. Were this the case, we might give up altogether the use of means for the attainment of our ends, or be utterly regardless of their nature. The meaning evidently is no more, than that, with all a man's superiority, success is not to be *ensured*:—no man must count upon it with certainty.

“Time and chance happeneth to them all.”

“Time.”—There are favourable and unfavourable times in which men's lot may be cast; and such times too may occur alternately in the experience of the same individual. A man of very inferior talent, should he fall on a favourable time, may succeed with comparative ease; whereas in a time that is not propitious, abilities of the first order cannot preserve their possessor from failure and disappointment. And even the same period may

be advantageous to one description of business, and miserably the reverse to another; and it may thus be productive of prosperity to men who prosecute the former, and of loss and ruin to those engaged in the latter; although the superiority in knowledge, capacity, and prudence, may be all, and even to a great degree, on the losing side.

“Chance.”—We must not understand Solomon as intending, by the use of this word, to convey the idea that there is, or can be, any thing *absolutely fortuitous*. The reign of chance can never be more than imaginary. The very supposition of it is pregnant alike with impiety and absurdity. It is atheism.—Chance is a term denoting ignorance, not on God’s part, but on ours. It has been happily defined, although by a poet, yet without a poet’s fiction,—“direction which we cannot see.” The blind Goddess of Fortune is but the creation of a foolish and ungodly fancy. Without our Heavenly Father, “a sparrow falleth not to the ground;” and no figure could more strongly express the idea of unremitted attention to the minutest interests of his children, than his “numbering the hairs of their heads.” “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

The obvious meaning of chance here is, that there is an endless variety of circumstances and events, which cannot be foreseen, and over which,

therefore, no man can have any control, which yet must materially affect the success or the failure of all his schemes and operations. These “secret things” which “belong unto the Lord,” *appear to us* as if they came by chance; and men who fear not God, idly talk of Fortune favouring them when they prosper, and of her being blind, capricious, and partial, when they fail. But all is under the superintendence of Him who is infinite in wisdom, power, and goodness. And even with regard to ourselves, it is going too far to represent human life as a perfect *lottery*, in which the wheel goes round, and blanks and prizes are drawn out, without discrimination and with equal frequency, for the indolent and the active, for the prudent and the foolish; as if indolence and activity, prudence and folly, were without distinction in their respective tendencies. There is, however, beyond question, as universal experience evinces, and as the present times impressively testify, a vast deal of uncertainty in calculating the probabilities of a man’s success in any pursuit. Unanticipated circumstances may assign the laurel to the slow, and leave the swift uncrowned; may give victory to the weak, and bring defeat and shame to the strong; may confer riches and favour on the ignorant and indiscreet, and withhold them from the wise, the skilful, and intelligent.—That “chance” must have this restricted meaning, is obvious: for even if it were understood as exclusive of providence,

still facts could never bear out the affirmation, that there are no distinctive tendencies in different principles and modes of conduct, and that it is, unqualifiedly, all one as to the result, whether a man be diligent or slothful, prudent or insensate.

The sentiment of the eleventh verse is expanded in the twelfth :—" For man also knoweth not his time : as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds (that are) caught in the snare ; so (are) the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them."

" Man knoweth not his time," refers to the uncertainty of events, the fickleness of human affairs, already mentioned. A man may select his time for the execution of any purpose, with much apparent sagacity. To others, as well as to himself, it may seem the most promising that could have been chosen. Yet who can, with certainty, tell him what shall be? He knoweth not what a day may bring forth. The wind may suddenly shift. The tide may unexpectedly turn. The times may surprise him by an unlooked for change. He may cast his seed into an excellent bed, in the best of weather ; but numberless are the circumstances that may blast his hopes of a harvest. To-day may be an auspicious time, and his prospects may be brightened by the splendour of hope :—to-morrow may be unfavourable, and may cloud them with the darkness of despair. In this world of mutability, he must always plan and act with a measure of un-

certainly; and ought to preface all his undertakings with—"If the Lord will."

The fishes and the birds, roaming through their respective elements, with all the happy agility of freedom, dart suddenly into the net of the fisherman and the snare of the fowler. They are taken by surprise; taken, beyond escape; and taken, to be destroyed. "So (are) the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." An evil time is a time of misfortune and calamity, which often comes unexpectedly, without the possibility either of its being anticipated, or of its mischievous effects being shunned.

There is one most important time, of which men are left in total ignorance; the time that closes their connection with this world, terminating all their schemes, and labours, and enjoyments, and prospects. To the ungodly, this is indeed "an evil time," the worst of all times: and how often has it "fallen suddenly upon them!" How often, when a man has been in the uninterrupted course of his prosperity, rising rapidly to the summit of his wishes;—when he has realized his fortune, finished his house, laid out his lands,—and is saying to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry,"—is he "snared in an evil time," and in a moment goes down to the grave!—"O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"

His general observations, Solomon illustrates by a case, which we may suppose to have been a matter of fact that had come to his knowledge:—Verses 13—16. “This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it (seemed) great unto me. (There was) a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered this same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom (is) better than strength; nevertheless, the poor man’s wisdom (is) despised, and his words are not heard.”

“This wisdom seemed great” to Solomon. He was delighted with it. It was found where it was not looked for. The governors of the city, the public functionaries, would no doubt set all their wits to work, to devise means of safety. But they could think of none that gave any promise of proving effectual. They were at a stand; and would of course have surrendered at discretion, or have perished by the sword of exterminating vengeance. In this emergency, an obscure, unknown, “poor man, by his wisdom saved the city,” which was little in itself, ill defended, and quite incapable of withstanding the besieging army of a great king.

“Yet no man remembered this same poor man.”—The danger was no sooner over, than he was ungratefully forgotten, and his important service was unrewarded.—“Wisdom,” on this occasion, was

“better than strength,” and prevailed against it, foiling the might of the assailing enemy. But the honour that is due to wisdom is not always obtained by its possessor. Had this wise man been at the same time a man of station and wealth, his name would probably have been recorded in the annals of the city, a pillar possibly reared at the time to commemorate his service, and a monument of regret erected over his grave. But the man was poor; and having been neglected before, he quickly relapsed into his original obscurity. “His wisdom was despised, and his words were not heard.” They *were* indeed heard; but it was only in the moment of danger and alarm. Or, for aught we can say, the poor man’s scheme might be devised and executed by himself, done secretly, or with the concurrence and aid of a few more of his own station. And whether this was the case, or whether it was laid before the chief men of the city, and by them adopted, the effect might be envy, and consequent studied neglect. For although a pressing sense of immediate danger might induce them at the time to listen to and follow his counsel, it might still be with the despicable feelings of spiteful jealousy; and when the danger was past, the same feelings might induce them to treat with neglect the poor benefactor of their city; or he might speedily escape their memories, as “the chief butler,” when restored to his honours, “remembered not Joseph, but forgot him.”

But why is this incident introduced here? What is its connection with the writer's subject? The connection is far from being distant. It presents an illustration, in two views, of the sentiment in the eleventh verse. It shows, *in the first place*, that "the battle is not to the strong." A mighty monarch came against this small and feeble city, invested it, and constructed his works around it. Its destruction seemed inevitable. But there happened to be within its walls, amongst the obscure part of its population, a poor man, who in his wisdom suggested some expedient, which baffled the exertions and frustrated the hopes of the enemy, rendering all his engines and bulwarks useless and unavailing. This little circumstance, unforeseen and unexpected, disconcerted the whole project, and gave preservation and victory to the weak.—It shows, *secondly*, that "favour is not to men of skill."—It does not appear, it is true, that the poor man had any such object in view as courting favour. But he displayed wisdom and skill; and he missed their merited recompense. His poverty and obscurity, or the envy of those in power and station, deprived him of his due.

There seems, at first view, an inconsistency between the end of the sixteenth verse and the seventeenth. In the former it is said, "The poor man's wisdom (is) despised, and his words are not heard:—"—in the latter, "The words of wise (men) are heard in quiet, more than the cry of him that ruleth

among fools.”—In the seventeenth verse, there is probably a reference to the quiet way in which this “poor wise man” saved the city. We may suppose him to have communicated his scheme to two or three privately, who had the good sense to hear him, and to enter into his views; and whilst “the cry of him that ruled among fools,”—the loud and blustering bravadoes, it may be, of a senseless and headstrong ruler, were not only unavailing, but calculated to hasten and to aggravate the ruin of the place,—the wisdom of this poor man was “heard in quiet,” and was secretly, and without noise and ostentation, working its deliverance.—This renders the sixteenth and seventeenth verses quite consistent; the latter referring to the attention shown to his wise suggestions at the time, and their influence in effecting the deliverance of the city; and the former, to the subsequent disregard of the man himself and of his wisdom, when the threatening danger was past,—the indisposition then either to hear or to profit by it, or to give respect and honour to its possessor.

Verse 18. “Wisdom (is) better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.”

In the instance which Solomon had just adduced, the truth of the former part of this verse had been illustrated and established. Wisdom had proved its superiority to military weapons and warlike engines, for it had effectually overcome them; and it had thus accomplished what forcible resistance would

have attempted in vain. And even on the supposition that "weapons of war" could have delivered the city, still it must have been at the expense of blood, and of varied and accumulated distress,—of the tortures of the wounded, and the groans of the dying, and the tears of widows, and orphans, and friends;—all which was prevented by the timely exercise of wisdom.

From his being contrasted with "one sinner," we are naturally led to consider the wise man as not only politically sagacious and prudent, but wise in a higher sense,—truly good, influenced by right principles, by motives of genuine disinterested benevolence, by regard to the will of God and the obligations of duty, satisfied with the attainment of the benefit to others, without stopping to calculate the possible results to himself.—This one wise man *effected* much good: but "one sinner *destroyeth* much good." It is far easier to do harm, than to do good. And one wicked man, possessed of a little mischievous subtlety and address, may, and, alas! often does succeed, in thwarting and frustrating the best concerted schemes, overturning the most prudent and beneficial regulations, effectually embarrassing the wisdom of the wise, and impeding the efforts of the benevolent, and thus producing the most serious and incalculable injury.

The influence of one truly wise and good man may be very extensive, both upon the temporal and the spiritual condition of others,—in preventing

evil, and in promoting personal and social happiness. But how much good, on the contrary, may not one sinner destroy! and how much positive evil may he not be the instrument of working! How often has such a man broken the peace and ruined the comfort of families, which might otherwise have remained united and happy! How often has he sown in secret the seeds of jealousy and discord in a circle of friends and acquaintances! How often fanned the flame of discontent, sedition, and rebellion, in a community enjoying a happy measure of peace, freedom, and prosperity! How often has he blasted characters by defamation and slander, and thus marred and destroyed extensive usefulness! How often, by falsehood and misrepresentation, has he imposed on others, to the loss of their property, the ruin of their affairs, and the consequent distress of themselves and families! How often—But time would fail me to enumerate all the ways in which a sinner may destroy temporal good.—Then, when we think of the good he may destroy, and the evil he may occasion, of a spiritual kind, how weightily must the observation be felt by every serious mind! By plausible and sophistical, but palatable and seductive reasonings, he may shake and root out the half-formed principles of the unestablished inquirer, acting as Satan's instrument in "catching away what has been sown in his heart;" by his example, his counsel, his sneers, and his flatteries, by adorning, in captivating and allur-

ing colours, the pleasures of sin, touching by ridicule the feelings of false pride, representing as unreasonable the restraints of religion and virtue, praising the spirit, and working on the vanity, of his victim, he may successfully entice the young and unwary to criminal indulgence, and may thus baffle the efforts, and balk the delighted hopes, of godly parents. He may take a malignant pleasure in plying his arts of temptation upon the more established, and he may exult in the desolating effects of his occasional success,—when a godly man has been entangled in his snares, or has tripped and fallen over any of his stumbling-blocks, and has thus offended the church of God, opened the mouths of the profane to scorn and blasphemy, and hardened the infidel in his unbelief, and the transgressor in his course of sin. He may set himself down as a centre of contagion, and may spread all around him a moral and spiritual pestilence, counterworking all the purifying, salubrious, and life-giving efforts of piety and benevolence, of parental solicitude, ministerial zeal, and private philanthropy. The corruption of one may spread to ten; of ten to a hundred; of a hundred to a thousand. And it goes down through succeeding generations. The corrupted father communicates the taint to his children; and they again to theirs. So that the pernicious influence of “one sinner” that lived in the time of Solomon, may be widely felt, though it cannot be traced, even at the present day; and the

mischief of one destroyer of good amongst ourselves, may continue and increase to the very close of time !

My Christian brethren, let us bear in mind, that this infectious nature of sin is one of the reasons why we are admonished to attend to the purity of fellowship in the church of God.—“ Know ye not, that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened (bread) of sincerity and truth.”* “ Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God: lest any root of bitterness, springing up, trouble (you), and thereby many (be) defiled.”†—O let us beware of ever fancying there can be safety, where the Lord has declared there is danger. We are not sufficiently impressed with the deceitfulness of our own hearts, when we entertain such a thought. Let us ever cherish humility and self-vigilance; and see to it, that we ourselves be promoters and not destroyers of good. Let us, at the same time, in the united exercise of Christian love and Christian faithfulness, guard against the wilful admission of corruption, the voluntary implanting of “ roots of bitterness;” and when corruption has been unwittingly received, and has subsequently discovered itself, let us beware of its

* 1 Cor. v. 6—8.

† Heb. xii. 15.

presumptuous retention, in open-eyed disobedience to the will of Christ, self-sufficient insensibility to our own danger, and disregard of the honour of his name.

Although there are principles in our nature, as fallen creatures, which render the work of the sinner, in doing evil and destroying good, much more easy than that of the wise man in promoting good and repressing evil, yet let us be encouraged in all our benevolent labours, especially those for the spiritual benefit of others, by considering the extent of possible advantage from success in a single instance. The seduction of one is fearful, both in itself, and in the sad train of consequences that may arise from it. But let us not forget how valuable, in itself and in its possible results, is the conversion and salvation of one. "If any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he who converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Even if the good stopped here, it would be inestimably precious; for "what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" But think of the influence of this individual on others, in the family, in the circle of relatives and friends, and in the neighbourhood to which he belongs; and, through them, on successive generations to the end of time. "He established a testimony in Ja-

cob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known unto their children; that the generation to come might know (them, even) the children (who) should be born, (who) should arise and declare (them) to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.”*—How animating is the thought, (and there is no enthusiastic extravagance in it,) that the good we now do may continue to be felt, and felt in a constantly widening circle, till the last trumpet shall sound!—that one sinner brought back to God may, for aught we can tell, prove, in course of time, the salvation of thousands! The solitary seed that has yielded thirty, sixty, or a hundred fold, stops not there. Each of the grains of its produce may yield the same; and field must be added to field to receive the accumulating increase.—Let parents, let ministers, let sabbath-school teachers, let all in their respective spheres of spiritual influence, be stimulated by such considerations to lively and persevering exertions, and to the seizure of every opportunity, on which prudence lays not an evident interdict, of “seeking the profit of others that they may be saved.”

Let us further learn from this passage, to *beware of self-dependence*. If “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,” then ought the admonition to be obeyed, as the dictate of Divine

* Psal. lxxviii. 5—7.

wisdom as well as the injunction of Divine authority,—“Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths.” Fully assured, that, although to us the future is uncertain, and events that have been unanticipated may to our minds seem accidental, there is no such thing as chance or fatalism, but that all things are under the immediate and unceasing superintendence of an all-wise providence, let us consider it as our part to use means, to look to God for his blessing, and to leave the issue in his hands. This state of mind is the most consistent at once with duty and with happiness. It keeps the spirit tranquil; disposed to gratitude for success, and at the same time prepared for possible disappointment; “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeping the heart and mind by Christ Jesus.” As we ought not to “boast of to-morrow, because we know not what a day may bring forth;” so neither should we be over-anxious about to-morrow, because we may be distressing ourselves about what we are never to see. How beautiful, how affectionate, how persuasive, and how full of argument, the Saviour’s exhortations to his disciples against all anxious concern about the future days of life! “Wherefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat,

and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they? Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, (shall he) not much more (clothe) you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? [for after all these things do the Gentiles seek;] for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day (is) the evil thereof.”*

And whilst we learn the lesson of dependence on God respecting all our temporal interests, let us be equally on our guard against depending on ourselves in our Christian course, in our spiritual warfare,—in “running the race set before us,”—in

* Matt. vi. 25—34.

“fighting the good fight of faith.” Our speed in the one, our courage and strength in the other, and our victory in both, must come from above. Divesting ourselves of all self-confidence, let our trust be in Him who “giveth power to the faint, and to (them that have) no might increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew (their) strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.”*

Further: It is the part of true wisdom to be prepared, as far as its precautions can reach, against possible emergencies. Let none of you, then, count upon life,—no, not for an hour;—for “man knoweth not his time.” Death is at once the most certain and the most uncertain of all things. It must come; but *when*, or *how*, O who shall tell us? Every one of us has his “time,” fixed in the purpose of Him who “appoints us our bounds, that we cannot pass.” How awful will it be, if *that* time come upon any of you unawares!—if, “as the fishes are taken in an evil net, and the birds are caught in the snare,” so you should be “snared in an evil time,” by its “falling suddenly upon you.” Ah! then will it be to you an evil time indeed! O ye careless children of men, who are treading every moment on the verge of eternity, trifle no

* Isaiah xl. 29—31.

longer with its infinitely weighty concerns; lest it should be with you as it was with the incredulous and infatuated antediluvians, who scorned the warning voice of the “preacher of righteousness.” They were “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away.” Beware, then, lest while *you* “say, Peace and safety, sudden destruction should come upon you!” “What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, and call upon thy God” to save thee from the gathering storm; for the elements are conspiring thy ruin. Think not to brave it. Speed thee to the Ark which he has provided for thy security, and where alone thou canst be safe. Come to Jesus. Make him thy refuge. All shall then be well,—all safe,—safe for eternity.

And ye, brethren in the Lord, join to the lesson of dependence on God, the lesson of sleepless vigilance. It was not to men of the world, but even to his own disciples, that Christ addressed the warning, “Take heed, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.” “Be ye, therefore, sober, and watch unto prayer.” Be ever at your respective posts, in the service of your Master: and then, although you know not the time of his coming, it will never be to you “an evil time.” Whether he arrive “at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning,” let him find you watching.

In occupying your talents for the glory of God and for the good of men, you may not always meet from the latter with a suitable return. This "poor wise man, who by his wisdom delivered the city," had he been again placed in similar circumstances, might have been tempted to consult his own preservation only, and to leave those who had so ungratefully neglected and scorned him, to shift for themselves. This would have been the conduct dictated by the ordinary principles prevalent in the world. But the bible teaches a lesson more disinterested and generous. We must not be "weary in well-doing," even to those from whom we may have met with a sorry recompense. Let your eye be directed, not to men, but to him who "is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye show toward his Name;" and his example is to be the model from which you are to copy:—"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them who love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more (than others?) do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."*

* Matt. v. 44—48.

LECTURE XIX.

ECCLES. X. 1—10.

1 “ *Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send
forth a stinking savour : (so doth) a little folly him that
2 is in reputation for wisdom (and) honour. A wise man’s
heart (is) at his right hand ; but a fool’s heart at his left.
3 Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his
wisdom faileth (him), and he saith to every one (that) he
4 (is) a fool. If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee,
leave not thy place ; for yielding pacifieth great offences.
5 There is an evil (which) I have seen under the sun, as an
6 error (which) proceedeth from the ruler ; Folly is set in
7 great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have seen
servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon
8 the earth. He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it ; and
9 whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Whoso
removeth stones shall be hurt therewith ; (and) he that
10 cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. If the iron
be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to
more strength : but wisdom (is) profitable to direct.”*

HAVING spoken of the excellence of wisdom, Solomon here proceeds to lay down certain maxims, relative both to its advantages, and to the mode of its exercise.

The first of these is an observation founded in universal experience, and arising both from the nature of the thing, and from the corruption of the human heart:—Verse 1. “Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour; (so doth) a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom (and) honour.”

When the apothecary has compounded his ointment, of the richest and sweetest ingredients, with much skill, and care, and time; if flies fall into it, and die there, and putrify, especially in a hot climate, they will destroy its pleasant fragrance, and produce an offensive stench. So, when a man has acquired a high reputation for wisdom, and an honourable character, the higher he rises in public estimation, the more cautious and guarded he requires to become in his behaviour: for “a little folly” will mar, and may even ruin his good name; and bring him to neglect and disgrace. As dead flies spoil the sweet odour of the ointment, so doth “a little folly,” a remaining foible, a comparatively trifling inconsistency, or even an occasional slip, affect the character of the man who “is in reputation for wisdom (and) honour.”

The causes of this do not lie deep.

In the first place. In proportion to the height of a man’s reputation, *he attracts notice.* The eyes of others are upon him. The fool passes unheeded; nobody minding what he says or what he does. But when a person rises to eminence, his behaviour

is marked. It becomes the subject of scrutiny and of conversation. An importance attaches to whatever he is, or says, or does. And the more eyes are fastened on a man, the less likely is any infirmity or fault to escape detection and animadversion. “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.”

Secondly. The higher a man's reputation is, *the more is expected of him.* The less allowance, consequently, is made for his failings. That which in an ordinary man would have passed unobserved, is noticed in him with surprise and astonishment. Instead of his defects being lost, like the spots in the sun, amid the blaze of his excellences, the very light of his virtues serves to give them relief and prominence; so that they are in great danger of proving a counterbalance to all his estimable qualities.

Thirdly. This danger is tenfold increased by the influence of a principle, which, (alas for human nature!) is too welcome a guest, too close an inmate in our bosoms, and of which we had occasion, in a former lecture, to expose the odious nature and mischievous effects,—I mean *spite* and *envy*. It is the malevolent wish of envy, to keep down a rising character to the common level. We are mortified by the superiority of others, especially if, by talent and diligence, they have passed ourselves in the race and left us behind them. It is its aim and business, both to depreciate the merits, and to

magnify the faults, of its object ; and eagerly does it avail itself of “ a little folly,” marking it with hawk-eyed keenness, exposing and exaggerating it, setting it in the most unfavourable lights, associating it sily and malignantly with each of the person’s excellences, not so as to hide it by means of them, but to disparage them by means of it, and in every way improving it to the discredit and the ruin of his reputation.

Such being the case, the obvious improvement which should be made of it by “ the man who is in reputation for wisdom (and) honour,” is, to “ ponder the path of his feet,”—to be *very circumspect*, and *very consistent*. This he ought to aim at with unremitting vigilance, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of his usefulness, in the employment of his wisdom and influence, for the good of men, and for the glory of God ; his power to do good being necessarily proportioned to the esteem in which he is held.

Solomon’s next observation regards the advantage of the wise man over the fool, in the management of all descriptions of business :—Verses 2, 3. “ A wise man’s heart (is) at his right hand ; but a fool’s heart is at his left. Yea, also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth (him), and he saith to every one (that) he (is) a fool.”

It is evident from the connection, that the *heart* in this place, as in many other instances in the

scriptures, means the *judgment* or *understanding* of man. It is the same word that, in the third verse, is rendered *wisdom*; “His wisdom faileth him,” being, in the original, “his *heart* faileth him.”—The “right hand” is the hand which men usually employ, in works both of labour and of skill; and which they use with the greatest readiness, dexterity, and success. The expression, therefore, in the second verse, “A wise man’s heart (is) at his right hand, but a fool’s heart is at his left,”—seems to mean—*First*. That a wise man *minds his own proper business*; whereas the fool neglects what belongs to himself, and is exceedingly officious, intermeddling, and full of sagacious counsel, in every one’s concerns but his own. Any wisdom he has is “at his left hand:” it is applied in the wrong place.—*Secondly*. The understanding of the wise man is at all times *ready for his immediate direction*,—“at his right hand.” So that, being steadily applied to its proper business, it is prepared to meet times of emergency, and to act as circumstances direct, so as not to ruin or even injure his affairs, either by imprudent precipitation or unnecessary delay. The fool, on the contrary, is ever uncertain, ever at a loss, all hesitation and perplexity. His wisdom is always to seek. It is never to be found at home; but is continually roaming abroad among a thousand matters with which he has nothing to do; so that, in his own proper concerns he is incessantly taken at unawares,

startled, disconcerted, stupified; and the moment of needful action being lost, his affairs are irretrievably disordered.—*Thirdly*. That which the wise man does, his wisdom enables him to do *well*,—with *skill* and *dexterity*—(a word derived from the very circumstance of the right hand being the hand of promptitude and skill,*)—whereas the fool, when he does any thing at all, does it with his left hand; not only applying any little fragments of wisdom he may possess, in a wrong direction, but bungling, blundering, and failing, even in that which he attempts.

The fool has not even so much wisdom as to conceal his folly. “When he walketh by the way,”—that is, in the whole of his ordinary intercourse with men,—in the daily concerns of common life,—“his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.” He cannot meet a neighbour on the road without making an exposure of his folly. By some ridiculous speech or out-of-the-way action, he makes the vacancy or the distortion of his mind as apparent as if he were to say to every one “I am a fool.” He blabs out imprudently and inconsiderately what he does know, without regard to time, place, or company; or he talks ignorantly and absurdly of what he does not know. By his words, by his actions, or by his manner in both, he tells to all his folly, exposing himself to the pity of some, and to the

* Latin—Dexter.

contempt and derision of others. Nobody respects him ; nobody can place any dependence upon him, or commit any business to his care.

The fourth verse contains one of the counsels of wisdom :—" If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place ; for yielding pacifieth great offences." It is very similar to the advice in chap. viii. 3. " Be not hasty to go out of his sight ; stand not in an evil thing ; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him."

The case brought before us is that of a real or supposed fault on the part of a subject, by which the anger of his prince has been excited.—In such circumstances, a proud and hasty fool would instantly throw up his place, avow himself a rebel, and endanger his head. Wisdom will act a different part. " Leave not thy place :"—do not rashly and passionately quit the prince's presence and renounce his service. If you have committed the fault, frank and ingenuous confession is more than your interest,—it is your incumbent duty. If you have not, yield a little in the mean time, and take a more favourable opportunity afterwards, when " the spirit of the ruler" is calmer, and more disposed to listen to reason and right, of clearing your character, and establishing your innocence. Do not argue with an angry man ; and least of all with an angry prince. Let him have time to cool. " Yielding pacifieth great offences." It settles them, and brings them to rest. There is a vast

deal more to be gained by meekness and gentleness, and by a little calm prudence and management, than by resentful and intemperate violence.

Rulers, it is acknowledged by the Royal Preacher, do not always conduct themselves agreeably to the dictates of true wisdom, or in a manner in all respects calculated to fix the affectionate regards of their subjects. One evil, fitted to give occasion for much envy and jealousy, contempt and wrath; he specifies in verses 5—7: “There is an evil (which) I have seen under the sun, as an error (which) proceedeth from the ruler. Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.”

The evil which is animadverted on in these words is the capricious and unreasonable advancement of ignorant and incapable minions from a low to a high station, from inferiority and subjection to eminence and authority; whilst the nobles of the land, who, from their birth, and wealth, and influence, might be supposed destined to high place, and by their education, and the study of the law, and government, and politics of their country, qualified for elevation and rule, are overlooked and degraded, being set beneath the indigent, and empty, and despicable upstart; so that while a servant,—or rather a slave,—rides in all the pomp of pageantry and state, princes and nobles walk,—as his inferiors and attendants,—on foot. This

was far from being a very uncommon case, under the despotic governments of the East; slaves of the palace being not unfrequently, from caprice, partiality, or secret selfishness, advanced to the highest ranks, to look down, in haughty superciliousness, on their natural and deserving superiors.

The passage is not to be interpreted as if it precluded men of low degree from mounting by their own merit, gradually and fairly, by successive steps of advancement, even to the highest and most honourable offices of the state. The evil consists in elevating the low, not merely from a low station, but from such a station accompanied with *incapacity* :—“FOLLY is set in great dignity.” Uneducated, inexperienced, narrow-minded and imprudent men, as low in mental character as base in birth and in station, are suddenly exalted to superiority and power, by senseless or unprincipled favouritism. Such men have disgraced their unseemly dignity, by mean, mercenary, imperious, rash, and ruinous misconduct. For, in most instances, such *upstarts* in the state, turn out not merely fools, but insolent and overbearing tyrants.

Many a time has such conduct brought shame and ruin, not on the favourite himself only, but on his imprudent master, accompanied sometimes also with serious calamity to the state: and the language of the following verse might be considered as referring to the foolishness of such a ruler; who,

in degrading his nobles, and exalting his unworthy minion, *digs a pit for himself*:—Verse 8. “He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.”

The eighth, ninth, and tenth verses, however, taken together, may be more naturally interpreted, as a caution against rash, inconsiderate rebellion, —precipitate, ill-advised, ill-concerted, and ill-conducted attempts, to overturn or to alter the established government of a country. Such attempts can never be made without imminent hazard to him who ventures upon them:—Verses 8—10. “He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and he that breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Whoso removeth stones shalt be hurt therewith; (and) he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then he must put to more strength:—but wisdom is profitable to direct.”

Even with regard to such a court minion as has above been described, the patriotic desire to bring him down from his elevation, and to deliver the country from the mischiefs his folly inflicts upon it, may be attended with no little danger in the attempt at its accomplishment. The man who violently seeks his downfall may bring injury, and possibly even death, upon himself.—But the verses have a general and strong application to those who give way to the suggestions of pride and resentment for real or fancied injuries, and are driven on,

by intemperate discontent, to schemes of sedition, or open rebellion. When a man digs a pit, there is a risk of his falling into it himself. So when either a ruler becomes a tyrant, or a subject a rebel, the oppressive abuse of power endangers the safety of the one, and the resistance of lawful authority that of the other. The violent dealing both of the tyrant and of the rebel, is ever ready to come down upon their own heads. All history concurs to show us how both the one and the other have “digged pits” for themselves,—falling victims to their own lawless passions, or to their inconsideration and rashness; the retributive justice of Divine providence frequently displaying itself, in infatuating wicked men, in leaving them to outwit themselves, and to be “snared in the works of their own hands.”—The man who “breaks a hedge,”—an old hedge, where serpents are wont to lurk, may expect to be bitten: so he who attempts incautiously to break down or to root up the ancient fences and boundaries of law and government, is in imminent jeopardy of receiving deadly stings;—either bringing down premature vengeance upon his head from the existing powers, or involving himself in ruin by the disturbances which he excites.

“Whoso removeth stones”—from a building, for instance, with the view of pulling it down,—“shall be hurt therewith;” the stones falling upon him, bruising him, and breaking his bones,—especially if he goes to work in a hasty and unskilful manner,

or attempts the removal of what is too heavy for his strength:—so the man who sets himself to pull down or to alter the fabric of the constitution and government of a country, undertakes a work of no light or trifling difficulty, and a work always of hazard to himself, and very often of fearfully doubtful benefit to others. It is a vast deal easier to find fault than to mend; to complain of what is wrong, than to substitute what is right; to pull down an old house, than to build up a new one.

“(And) he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered therewith.” In all cases there is risk of this. But the risk is various in degree; and it is especially great, when a man sets about his work with bad tools:—Verse 10. “If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength;” and the more strength he is obliged to apply, the hazard of accident becomes the more imminent. So is it with the man who presumes to act the part of a corrector of errors, and reformer of abuses, without natural capacity, without experience and skill, without adequate and well-prepared means; or who attempts to accomplish by force and violence what he cannot effect by prudence and management. The peril to himself is thus tenfold augmented, and along with the peril to himself, the hazard of mischief to others.

But in these and in all other matters, “wisdom is profitable to direct.” It is of use to guide us, in the whole of our conduct, according to the circum-

stances which providence allots us:—to “direct” to the most proper *objects* of desire and pursuit, and to the best *means* of attaining them; to the most eligible *method of employing* these means, and to the most suitable *time* for their application. All these come within the province of wisdom; and to all these due attention is necessary, in order to good being done effectually and safely, without failure and shame, and without concomitant or subsequent mischief.

Allow me, before closing—in the *first place*, to apply the observation in the first verse of the chapter, in a more particular manner, to *Christian character*.—“A good name,” it is said in the beginning of the seventh chapter, “(is) better than precious ointment.” In proportion to its value, it should be preserved with care; as the apothecary will be anxious, according to the fineness and costliness of his perfume, to keep it from dead flies, and every other means of deterioration and corruption. It is precious in itself, and ought to be carefully retained for its own sake. It is precious on account of the happy influence imparted by it, in enforcing all a man’s instructions, and counsels, and attempts at usefulness; and should be cherished for the sake of its effects. When a man possesses a high character as a CHRISTIAN, he is “in reputation for wisdom and honour” of the most excellent kind. This is “a good name” indeed;—the best it is possible to

enjoy. It is like that sacred ointment, compounded by the instructions of God himself, which was to be applied to no common or profane use, and of which no imitation was permitted to be made. O my Christian brethren, of what importance is it, for the honour of God our Saviour, and for the best interests of our fellow-men, that we preserve this reputation untainted! When David, by his fall, "gave occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," he did essential injury to both; injury that has never been repaired even to this day:—for his recorded sin is still the sneer of the scoffing infidel, and the encouragement of the determined offender. O seek, earnestly and importunately seek, those supplies of grace that are needful, for enabling you to maintain a steady consistency,—to keep your garments clean, amid the pollutions of a defiled and defiling world,—to keep the sweet perfume of your Christian virtues free from the corruption of offensive incongruities. Remember the eyes of the men of the world are intently fixed on those whom the blessed Redeemer has "chosen out of the world," and who profess to have separated themselves from its sins and its vanities. They watch them narrowly. They are acute detectors of inconsistency. They have a malignant satisfaction in the discovery of evil; and, when a discovery is made, there are no bounds to the severity of their censure; they know not what it is to make allowances. It speedily circulates, gathering aggravations in its progress.

It is commented on with all the keenness of invective, and all the bitterness of sarcasm; with the sneer, the shrug, the wink, the smile of irony, the sallies of satirical humour, and the loud laugh of jesting and buffoonery. The unhappy transgressor may have “wept a silent flood;” his penitent spirit may have been “pierced through with many sorrows;” he may have “confessed his transgression to the Lord,” and found forgiveness at the foot of the cross. But the evil he has done to others may be beyond remedy.—And remember, my brethren, it is not by gross sins alone that your Christian reputation and usefulness may be injured. Flaws, and defects, and failings, which in others would pass unnoticed, may be marked and magnified in you. The unguarded liberty of a single hour may sink in the scale the character acquired in successive years; and even a foible may mar your influence, and be like the dead fly in the ointment of the apothecary. The higher you stand in situation and repute, the greater is your danger, and the more imperative the call to vigilant self-jealousy.—Be you ever so watchful, it is true, you may be the victims of calumny and false accusation: but let it be your constant aim, with the implored aid of the Spirit of God, to “abstain from all appearance of evil,” and to “cut off occasion from those who desire occasion” against yourselves, and against the Master whom you serve. “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

Let your speech (be) alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and (be) ready always to (give) an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ."*

Secondly. If a wise man's heart is at his right hand, and a fool's heart at his left, there is one most important particular, in which all are by nature fools; and the grace of God alone corrects the folly.—There is one object, about which every man whose understanding is not miserably perverted, must feel a special solicitude; and for which, calculating on the principles of common prudence, every thing else ought to be cheerfully sacrificed. Yet while "all things are full of labour," the diversified toils of men are almost exclusively for "the meat that perisheth." How few comparatively mind the gracious injunction, to "labour for that which endureth to eternal life!" This is a description of labour to which men have no natural inclination; in which, alas! every man's heart is "at his left hand." He either neglects it altogether, or he sets about it on false principles, and in a wrong way. The truly wise man, the man whose heart is "at his right hand," considers

* Col. iv. 5, 6. 1 Pet. iii. 15, 16.

immortality as incomparably the most important concern of an immortal creature; and the service of God, in whatever sphere he occupies, as his happiness and his honour. To this service he applies his right hand, employing in it all his power and all his skill.—And whilst he pursues the highest of all aims, he does it according to the directions of a wisdom superior to his own. The fool may attempt to serve God in his own way and in his own strength, and to attain immortal life on the ground of his own fancied merits. But the wise man, impressed with the presumption and vanity of all such attempts on the part of sinful creatures, guilty, condemned, and without strength, accepts, with gratitude, the offers of mercy. Instead of “going about to establish his own righteousness,” trying to make out a condition of life which he has already violated, forming and breaking unprofitable resolutions, he “submits himself to the righteousness of God,”—“the righteousness which is by faith.” “Accepted in the beloved,” he gives himself to God in active service, under the impulse of grateful love. His *right hand*, and all the powers of his mind directing its efforts, are devoted to his new Master. He follows implicitly the dictates of his will; throwing aside his own inventions and reasonings, and pursuing Divine ends by Divine means, seeking God’s glory in God’s own way, and never presuming that he can improve upon the counsels of Heaven. When he

acts otherwise than thus, his "heart is at his left hand." "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God; for it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain." If, instead of humbly abiding by the instructions given us, we begin to devise rules and to follow methods of our own, it will turn out in the end only an exhibition of our folly. It will be "saying to every one that we are fools." And instead of whatsoever we do prospering, nothing can be anticipated from our schemes but failure and shame.

Thirdly. Observe the manner in which all offences and differences should be managed, if our object be to heal, and to restore confidence and peace.—The advice and sentiment in the fourth verse may be profitably generalized. You may not be called to "stand before kings," and to incur the displeasure of rulers. But in all the various intercourse of life,—in the family, in the church, in the world,—bear in mind the maxim, that "yielding pacifieth great offences." Nothing is to be gained by proud defiance and angry violence; by the display of an unbending spirit; a spirit that scorns to confess its own faults, and that seems to stoop and condescend, with haughty superciliousness, in receiving the acknowledgments of others. A

gentle yielding spirit is the spirit of conciliation and harmony. Anger irritates and inflames the wound; meekness mollifies, cleanses, and heals it. Resentful pride adds fury to the storm; a mild demeanour changes it to a calm. By the pouring on of oil we may smooth the wave, which we should lash and rebuke in vain. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also (do) ye. And above all these things (put on) love, which is the bond of perfectness: and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."*

Fourthly. It is a good general principle, reasonable in its nature, and beneficial in its application, that every man keep within his own sphere in society, discharging its duties with humility, and judging others with candour.—Public men are exposed to many and strong temptations; and on many occasions, amidst the contending interests of the members of their own community, and the relative claims of foreign states, cannot fail to be environed with perplexing difficulties. We certainly expect more than is reasonable, if we imagine they are never to err, or that their errors are always

* Col. iii. 12—15.

to be trivial. Let us place ourselves in their situation, and, sensible of the deceitfulness of our own hearts, and of our liableness to err and to be imposed upon even in the little concerns of common life, let us not be extravagant in our expectations, or harsh and contemptuous in our judgments.—Not that princes and the administrators of government are never to be told of their errors, and of the dangers and the mischiefs to which the country is exposed by their misrule. Only let us be diffident and candid, and ready to make fair and reasonable allowances.—And let us beware of rash and hasty interference. There are few things in which consideration and caution are more imperiously required, than the redress of grievances and the reformation of abuses. Resentment and pride are dangerous counsellors; and measures of precipitation and violence are seldom either equitable or expedient. Those men are often the most forward with their schemes and their offers of aid, who are least qualified for the work, and least aware either of the difficulties of its execution, or of the problematical uncertainty of its consequences.—The body politic, like the animal body, will ever be most vigorous and thriving, when all the members keep their proper places, and duly fulfil their respective functions. And the same similitude is applied by inspired authority to the church, or the body of Christ. “The body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand,

I am not of the body ; is it therefore not of the body ? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body ; is it therefore not of the body ? If the whole body (were) an eye, where (were) the hearing ? and if the whole (were) hearing, where (were) the smelling ? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased him.—And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee ; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you.—That there should be no schism in the body ; but (that) all the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”*

Beware, especially, of intermeddling with others from envy, or any such malignant principle, with a view to bring them down. Many a time, in such cases, has the saying been verified, “ He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it.” In the secret workings of his providence, the Lord often turns into foolishness the evil devices of men against one another, and particularly against his own people, and entangles their feet in the meshes of their own snares. Haman was hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai ; and Mordecai, whom he had sought to crush, was advanced to dignity and honour.—The author of a calumny digs a pit, into which he not unfrequently falls

* 1 Cor. xii. 14—18, 21, 25.

himself. He prepares a grave for the reputation of another, and he who propagates the slander assists him in deepening and widening it; and in the issue it buries his own. "Judge not, that ye be not judged: for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy."*

Lastly. Never forget whence all the "wisdom" that is "profitable to direct," and especially all spiritual understanding of truth and duty, must be sought and found. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him." "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." "For this cause we also—do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." "Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou (art) the God of my salvation; on thee do I hope all the day."†

* Matt. vii. 1, 2. James ii. 13.

† James i. 5. iii. 17 Col. i. 9, 10. Psal. xlv. 4, 5.

LECTURE XX.

ECCLES. X. 11—20.

11 *“Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and*
12 *a babbler is no better. The words of a wise man’s mouth*
 (are) gracious: but the lips of a fool will swallow up him-
13 *self. The beginning of the words of his mouth (is) fool-*
 ishness; and the end of his talk (is) mischievous madness.
14 *A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall*
15 *be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? The*
 labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because
16 *he knoweth not how to go to the city. Woe to thee, O*
 land, when thy king (is) a child, and thy princes eat in
17 *the morning! Blessed (art) thou, O land, when thy king*
 (is) the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season,
18 *for strength, and not for drunkenness! By much sloth-*
 fulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of
19 *the hands the house droppeth through. A feast is made*
 for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answer-
20 *eth all (things). Curse not the king, no, not in thy*
 thought; and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber: for
 a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which
 hath wings shall tell the matter.”

IN these verses, Solomon pursues the same general train of thought as in those which precede; com-

paring together the respective qualities and effects of wisdom and folly.

Verse 11. "Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment, and a babbler is no better."—There is in these words an allusion to a practice said to prevail in the East, of charming adders by the power of sounds, fascinating them by musical incantations, and rendering them for the time harmless to the persons who handled them. There are references to the same custom in other parts of scripture; and the fact is vouched by considerable authorities. "Their poison" (the poison of wicked men) "(is) like the poison of a serpent: (they are) like the deaf adder, (that) stoppeth her ear; that will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming ever so wisely." "Behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which (will) not (be) charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the Lord."*

The meaning of the verse before us, however, does not at all depend on the reality of the alleged fact. Whether it was authentic, or only the general belief, the sentiment expressed is the same.—"Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment,"—that is, he will bite *unless he be charmed*: "and a babbler is no better." This latter clause is by some rendered—"and there is no success to the master of the tongue;" and is interpreted as expressing the vanity of the most exquisite incan-

* Psal. lviii. 4, 5. Jer. viii. 17.

tations, even by “charmers charming ever so wisely,” *after the bite has been inflicted*;* and as intended to warn against delay in softening and subduing a dangerous character, and thus preventing what, when once done, it may be far from easy to remedy. But it was not by the subtle eloquence of the tongue, that serpents were charmed; and the connection evidently favours the translation of the Hebrew phrase, signifying “master of the tongue,” by such an English designation as “babblers,” or *talker*;—a man who is *all tongue*.—This “babblers” is the very person to be charmed. He is compared to a serpent. His tongue is dangerous in the extreme,—doing injury sometimes without design and sometimes with it,—from the want of common sense, or from the want of principle. It is “an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” He who gives to his tongue an unrestrained license, and is guided in the use of it neither by principle nor by prudence, is a man that requires to be managed with peculiar caution. Contradiction and violence may only irritate, and make the venom of his tongue the more virulent and deadly. He must be *charmed*. We must find out his right side,—the way to gain his good graces, to tame him, and keep him gentle. If he be a man of power, the danger of meddling with him becomes the more imminent, and the necessity for cautious management the more imperative.

* Si serpens momorderit, non incantatus, quid præstabit peritissimus incantator?—*Van der Palm*.

But a babbler is dangerous not only to others ; he is equally so to himself :—Verse 12. “The words of a wise man’s mouth (are) gracious ; but the lips of a fool swallow up himself.”—“The words of a wise man’s mouth,”—of the man who is guided by sound principle and discretion, and a due consideration of circumstances and characters,—“are gracious :”—they are kind and insinuating, adapted, in times of difficulty, to gain and to secure the friendship of others,—to avert gathering storms, and to still the tempest when it has begun to rage. Such were the words of Jacob, when, after having committed himself to the God of his fathers, he went to meet his brother Esau, whose proud resentment he had so much cause to fear.* And such were the words of Abigail to David, when his wrath had been kindled by the insolent conduct of her churlish and thankless husband, and his purpose of vengeance had been formed, and was on the eve of immediate execution.†

The contrast of the first clause of this verse with the second, clearly shows what is meant by the *graciousness* of the wise man’s words :—“but the lips of a fool swallow up himself.” His rash, imprudent, and passionate, or his unprincipled and slanderous talk, is incessantly exposing him to hazards, alienating his friends, exasperating his enemies, and bringing upon him their open or their secret vengeance. He thus digs pits for himself

* Gen. xxxii.

† 1 Sam. xxv.

that may swallow him up, and becomes the victim of his own folly.—The conduct of the successor of Solomon in the throne of Israel, affords an apt illustration of “a fool’s words swallowing up himself.” Had Rehoboam followed the sound advice of the aged counsellors of his father, and “spoken *good words* to the people,” when they came to implore a mitigation of their burdens, all had been well. They would have sworn a willing allegiance; would have shouted “God save king Rehoboam!” and would have been, as the old men expressed it, “his servants for ever.” But, like a fool, instead of his words being “gracious,” he “answered the people roughly,” talked, with supercilious severity, of “his little finger being thicker than his father’s loins,” and of “chastising them with scorpions in place of whips:” and his ungracious words “swallowed up himself.” They roused the indignant spirit of the people, divided his kingdom, and alienated for ever from the house of David the whole of Israel except the tribe of Judah.

We cannot wonder that the fool’s words should be represented as thus hazardous to himself as well as to others, when we consider the description of them in the thirteenth verse:—“The beginning of the words of his mouth (is) foolishness; and the end of his talk (is) mischievous madness.”—When he speaks at all he speaks foolishly; and commencing in folly, he concludes in madness: he either works himself up to a pitch of frenzy, by the very

power of eager and continued vociferation, fretting and fuming with ridiculous and extravagant passion, at phantoms possibly of his own creation, which his wild and incoherent mind has embodied into reality, and, by dwelling upon them and talking of them, has aggravated to a hideous magnitude:—or, if he happens to meet with the smallest check or contradiction,—if he is not listened to with the attention to which he deems such an oracle entitled,—if his hearer does not appear to feel along with him to the full extent to which he absurdly feels himself;—he is instantly on fire, all blaze, and smoke, and noise; he is thrown more and more off his guard; till his passion becomes “mischievous madness,” perilous to all within his reach, and whom he has power to injure, and not less perilous to himself. Were it not for the harm which such a combustible talker, in his moments of inflammation, may occasion, along with the pain produced by the humiliating spectacle of a fellow-man exposing himself, as the wretched dupe of his own imbecility and senseless passion, he might well be laughed at for the ludicrous incongruity between his feelings and their exciting causes, between his endless and overpowering talk, and the subjects of his voluble vehemence.—The character is in this verse shortly but strikingly touched. It is far from being uncommon. And there are few more dangerous, or more difficult to manage.

Few ideas and many words, is the next feature in

the portraiture of the fool:—Verse 14. “A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?”

Some, I believe, have fancied, that Solomon here *mimics* the fool,—giving an exemplification or specimen of what he means. Rather than cease talking, the fool will repeat the same thing in much the same words:—“A man cannot tell what shall be,—and what shall be after him, who can tell him?” But this, if it be ingenious, is not solid. The two clauses are not of the same meaning. The latter is not a mere vain repetition of the former. “A man cannot tell what shall be,” expresses a person’s own inability to dive into the future; and “what shall be after him, who can tell him?” expresses the inability of all others to give him the information he may wish for.

By others, the verse is considered as reproving the presumptuous vanity of the fool’s talk. His being “full of words,” they think, refers particularly to his foolish boastings of what he is to do,—his airy promises,—his extravagant and confident schemes for the future, and vauntings of their certain success;—a very common way in which the fool utters his mind and proclaims his folly; forgetting entirely, that while he thus talks at random, and roams at large over the fields of futurity, with no doubts, no conditional *ifs*, no humble recollections of dependence, between him and the attainment of all his speculations,—“a man cannot tell

what shall be ; and what shall be after him, who can tell him ?”

Others still,—and this is probably the true meaning,—interpret the words as descriptive of the loose incoherency, the unconnected heterogeneous jumble, of the fool’s discourse ; which is so mingled, so impertinent, so disjointed, that no man at any one part of it, can tell, or can even guess, what is to come next. No man can judge from what he is now saying, what he is about to say, or from what he is now doing, what he is about to do. If the person who is himself at a loss puts the question to others, he finds them as unable to conjecture as himself:—“ a man cannot tell what is to be ; and what is to come after it, who can tell him ?” All is *Babel* ; no order, no system, no associated pairs of ideas, no rational and perceptible sequence of one thing from another.

In these different interpretations, the character represented is much the same ; only it is brought out from the words in different ways. The fool appears in them all, as a man of words, rather than of ideas ; and “ full of words.” He talks at random about every thing, past, present, or to come ; and is always equally confident. It is vain to attempt arguing with him ; he cannot be kept to a point ; he will stupify you with talk ; and he must and will have the last word, even although he should only say at the end the same thing that he said at the beginning.

A total want of common sense in the most ordinary affairs of life, and transactions of business, completes the picture:—Verse 15. “The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them; because he knoweth not how to go to the city.”—This last expression was in all probability proverbial. “He does not know the way into the city,”—although, it may be, living in the immediate vicinity. He wanders in the openest and best frequented road:—that is, he blunders in the simplest and easiest matters. If there be a wrong way, he is sure to take it.—The whole verse connects immediately with the preceding. “A man cannot tell what is to be; and what shall be after it, who can tell him? The labour of the foolish wearieth *every one of them*:”—that is, all men that have any thing to do with him. They are teased, and harassed, and worn out of patience by his incorrigible stupidity, and the blunders it is perpetually producing; blunders, of which the rectification is sometimes much more troublesome than the entire business about which they are committed. Send the fool back to adjust his error, and it is twenty to one that he makes a second worse than the first.

The whole of this description of the absurdity of the fool’s discourse and conduct, and its mischievous consequences, may be understood as opposed to the brief commendation of wisdom in the end of the tenth verse, as “profitable to direct.” The wise man “orders his own affairs with discretion,” and

whatever is intrusted to him by others he manages with prudence, accuracy, and despatch, securing to himself approbation, confidence, and advancement.

In speaking of the opposite effects of wisdom and folly, it was not unnatural for the writer, himself a king, to introduce some remarks on the comparative influence of the one and the other, when predominant in the character of public rulers:—Verses 16, 17. “Woe to thee, O land, when thy king (is) a child, and thy princes eat in the morning. Blessed (art) thou, O land, when thy king (is) the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness.”

“A child,” in the former of these verses, refers not so much to *age*, as to *capacity*. A wo is pronounced on a country when its sovereign is ignorant, inexperienced, froward, fickle, wilful, easily imposed upon, and otherwise unfit, as a child, for his weighty charge. The historian of the reign of Rehoboam the son of Solomon, in the first book of Kings, informs us that that prince “was *forty and one years old* when he began to reign.” Yet when Abijah, his son and successor, expostulates with Jeroboam and his followers for their rebellion against his father, he represents Rehoboam as having been then “*young* and tender-hearted,” and incapable of withstanding them.* *Tender-hearted* is an epithet susceptible of different significations.

* Compare 1 Kings xiv. 21. with 2 Chron. xiii. 7.

When it is said of the good king Josiah that his “heart was tender,” that lowliness and contrition of spirit are meant, which arise from a sense of sin, and a becoming fear of God. He “humbled himself and wept before the Lord.” But this was not the character of Rehoboam; and the epithet, when applied to him, must be understood as expressing irresolute timidity, softness, want of courage and nerve, for encountering and going through difficulties. But whatever we conceive to be meant by tender-hearted; certainly, when we think of the age above assigned to Rehoboam, the word translated *young* cannot signify his being a child in years: and yet it is the same word as that rendered “*a child*” in the passage before us. It means evidently that he was raw and inexperienced, deficient in vigour, and without skill. We necessarily associate with extensive power lodged in the hands of a child, the ideas of general incapacity, inexperience, and liableness to imposition, and the probability at least of frowardness, fickleness, and self-will. Hence it is threatened, through the prophet Isaiah, as a curse upon the people of Israel, “I will give children (to be) their princes, and babes shall rule over them.”*

In such cases, it cannot be expected that public affairs should prosper; and especially when to the incapacity of the sovereign there is added the curse of an indolent and voluptuous nobility; when not

* Isaiah iii. 4.

only is the king of the land a child, but her “princes eat in the morning;” that is, when they are men “given to appetite,” devoted to sensual gratifications, their god their belly, indulging their propensities at unseasonable times, for their own pleasure, and to the neglect of the business of the state. A wise, and temperate, and active nobility, might counteract, by their counsel and their influence, the mischiefs of a weak prince’s incapacity. But when both these evils meet, then may it be said, with emphasis as well as truth, “Woe to thee, O land!” Every thing must be deranged and out of course; all the miseries must be felt of misrule, oppression, and anarchy; and all the moral horrors exhibited of a licentious and degraded community.

On the other hand—Verse 17. “Blessed (art) thou, O land, when thy king (is) the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness.”

The king’s being “a son of nobles” must not be understood as implying the sentiment that capacity is the uniform attendant of exalted birth. “A son of nobles,” evidently signifies a noble-minded prince, the descendant of illustrious progenitors, possessing their talents, and emulating their excellences. It stands opposed to the designation “a child” in the preceding verse.—Our Lord said on one occasion to the Jews, “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham;” and we are accustomed, with a peculiarity of mean-

ing which every one understands, to say of a youth, the resemblance of whose character to that of his parent is particularly marked and striking, He is his father's son. On the same principle of phraseology, "a son of nobles" is one who does not disgrace his birth, but who resembles the line of eminent ancestors from whom he has derived it.

The sense which we attached to the phrase in the former verse—"eating in the morning," is confirmed by its being placed in contrast with "eating in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness."—It is equally plain, from the mention of drunkenness, that "eating," in the sixteenth verse, means *feasting* in general, the being addicted to banqueting and revelry. And opposed to this is "eating in due season," not for the mere indulgence of animal appetite, the sordid gratification of sensual propensities, but for the natural and proper end of eating, the nourishment and invigoration of the bodily frame for the active exertion requisite in the fulfilment of the duties of life.—A wise, experienced, able, and accomplished monarch, with a temperate, steady, and patriotic nobility, devoted to public business and not to pleasure,—king and courtiers jointly applying their powers, from right principles, to the service of the commonwealth,—is a blessing of inestimable value to a country. The administration of affairs will then, under the smile of heaven, be proportionably prosperous; and the people, experiencing the benefits of good gov-

ernment, will be loyal and contented, and, influenced by the example of their superiors, sober, industrious, honourable, and happy.

Luxury is usually accompanied by slothfulness,—the love of ease and repose; and in every department of business, private and public, slothfulness is the parent of loss, decay, and ruin:—Verse 18. “By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.”

A house requires, not only to be built, but to be kept up. If due attention be not paid to this,—if a man, from laziness, after having got his habitation reared, will not be at the trouble of necessary repairs, a damage that is at first trifling will imperceptibly increase, and will be followed by others, till the building comes to be in danger. Resolutions to have it mended are daily formed, and daily neglected; the indolent inhabitant always finding some apology for putting off till to-morrow. To-morrow is so near, that matters, he says to himself, cannot be much worse before then; and as it is always equally near, the excuse which it furnishes is always equally valid. Day after day, as the time for purposed or half-purposed exertion comes round, the sluggard yawns out to himself the same convenient assurance, that a few hours can make no difference; till, by daily procrastination, the repair becomes impracticable, and the decayed and shattered tenement “falls through.”—All domestic

and all national affairs will necessarily go to wreck in the hands of the slothful. “The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; (therefore) shall he beg in harvest, and (have) nothing.” “I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, (and) nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, (and) considered (it) well; I looked upon (it, and) received instruction. (Yet) a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come (as) one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.” “The hand of the diligent shall bear rule; but the slothful shall be under tribute.” “The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe (a man) with rags.”*—In this last passage the same connection is observable, as in the subject of lecture, between *sensuality* and *sloth*.

When the rulers of a land addict themselves to sensual indulgence and profligacy, the public funds are wasted by the demands of their luxury, and lavished on the companions of their intemperance and riot; by which means the treasury is impoverished, and either the business of government, which cannot go on for a day without money, must be at a stand, or the royal coffers must be replenished by injurious and oppressive taxation.—Verse 11. “A

* Prov. xx. 4. xxiv. 30—34. xii. 24. xxiii. 21.

feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry ; but money answereth all (things).” Feasting and wine, laughter and merriment, are transient, unsubstantial, and profitless. What can they do towards the great ends of government? Which of the purposes can they serve, which would be effectually answered by the money that is thrown away upon them? The verse appears to be introduced, to aggravate the folly and criminality of the conduct reprobated in the sixteenth verse, of the princes of a land “ eating in the morning,”—giving themselves to unseasonable and intemperate festivity. The feast indeed yields them laughter and mirth. But wo to the land, when its princes expend on such frivolous and unworthy objects the money which ought to be devoted to the advancement of their country’s prosperity, and which, in government, equally as in other departments of life and business, “ answereth all (things),”—is indispensable to every step of its procedure.

Such conduct on the part of rulers presents a very strong temptation to their subjects, while they cannot but inwardly disapprove, dislike, and despise them, to give utterance to their feelings in the language of reviling and imprecation: and the chapter concludes with an admonition on this subject, founded on considerations of prudence, which do not however imply the exclusion of higher principles:—Verse 20. “ Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought, and curse not the rich in thy bed-

chamber : for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.”

This is an important general caution:—a caution, for which there is little occasion when a land is blessed with a king who is the son of nobles, and when its princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for revelry. Against such there is no disposition to vent imprecations :—they are a blessing, and they are blessed in return :—they reign in the hearts of a loyal and happy people. But, even when it is otherwise, when the king is a child, and the princes eat in the morning, there is an *official respect* due to the magistracy, independently of the personal character of the magistrate. Honour is enjoined to be paid to governors *as such*. “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord’s sake : whether it be to the king, as supreme ; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men : as free, and not using (your) liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all (men). Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.”* All those general principles, on the ground of which obedience is inculcated, enforce also respectful behaviour, and prohibit cursing and reviling. “Render therefore to all their

* 1 Pet. ii. 13—17.

dues; tribute to whom tribute (is due), custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.”*—“Conscience toward God” must be our first consideration,—a sense of duty arising from his authority. But the fear of punishment from men,—what the apostle Paul denominates “wrath,” is a second; which, although in its nature inferior, is yet perfectly justifiable and legitimate.—We ought not to do “in thought,” what it is wrong in the sight of God to do with our tongues: for “the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.” The most secret and deeply hidden thought of a malicious and cursing heart is perfectly known to him, though it never should give itself expression in words. And whilst all things are naked and open to him,—whilst our very “thoughts are heard in heaven;” let us not forget that kings, and the courtiers and the satellites of kings, have a sense of hearing unusually acute, and exercise a vigilance which few things can escape:—“A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.” This is a strong proverbial form of speech, expressive of the strange and unaccountable way in which such matters are frequently detected. They come to light,—nobody knows how. The course they have followed leaves no traces by which it can be searched out. It is as if “a bird of the air had carried the voice.” You are

* Rom. xiii. 7.

as much at a loss, as the Syrian monarch was, when Elisha the prophet “told the king of Israel the words that he spoke in his bed-chamber.” You are lost in unavailing conjecture; when that which has been “spoken in the ear in closets,” or whispered in a soliloquy in your most private retirement,—that which you have little more than thought,—finds its way to the throne, and exposes you to jealousy and to vengeance. “Curse not the king,” therefore, “no, not in thy thought, and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber.” Add prudence to principle. The thing is in itself wrong; and it is at the same time hazardous. It involves at once the displeasure of God, and the risk of forfeiting your head to men.

Let us now gather up some of those inferential lessons which are suggested by the verses.

The variety of character with which we must meet in our passage through the world, if we mix at all in the active scenes of life, is very great; and it is a lesson of no inferior consequence, to “walk in wisdom” toward them all. We must not, indeed, sacrifice integrity and a good conscience. These have no equivalent; no price at which they can be disposed of without irreparable loss. But it is a duty, as well as an advantage, to suit our behaviour to the characters of those with whom the intercourse of life brings us into contact. From a disdainful or a thoughtless disregard of this lesson, from treating men of all tempers and

characters alike,—from scorning or neglecting to *charm the serpent*,—much contention and wrath, disturbance and mischief, have arisen. Even *folly* itself is a genus that comprehends under it no inconsiderable number of species and varieties: and it is far from being a trifling or contemptible exercise of prudence, so to conduct ourselves towards fools themselves, as to avoid encouraging and puffing them up in their folly, and to save from injurious impression our own reputation and interest. “Answer not a fool according to his folly,” says the wise man elsewhere, “lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.” The seeming contrariety of these directions is perhaps most simply explained by observing the different senses of the phrase “according to his folly.” Answer not a fool *in a foolish manner*, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool *as his folly deserves*, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

Solomon doubtless uttered much pernicious folly himself, during “the days of his vanity,” when he resolved on making the trial of foolishness and madness as a source of enjoyment and pleasure. But after those days, so unworthy of him, were over,—when “his understanding returned to him,” and he deduced the lessons of wisdom from the experience of folly, O how “gracious” were “the words of his mouth!” With the meek humility and tender earnestness of one who deeply and

bitterly felt the absurdity and the criminality of his own ways, he addresses his admonitions to others, and seeks to win their hearts to that which is good. This he does in the book before us ; and how fine too are the exemplifications of it in the introductory portion (the first nine chapters) of the book of Proverbs ! How affectionate, how faithful, how fervent, how insinuating, how endearing ! That youth's heart must be sadly infatuated, or wretchedly hardened, that can slight and resist counsel so administered.

But we know into whose lips, above all others, " grace was poured." " The Spirit of the Lord rested upon him,—the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Truly gracious were the words which proceeded out of *his* mouth ; in themselves profitable and saving ; and, in the manner of them, uniting the divine dignity of " one who had authority," with all the mildness and engagingness of winning persuasion : —" Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." In his experience a mournful evidence is presented, that the most gracious words, the fullest of wisdom and kindness, will not always secure from hatred and opposition, when that which is uttered is unpalatable and offensive truth. There were times when his countrymen hung upon his lips with delighted eagerness ; all bearing him witness, and " marvelling at the gracious words which pro-

ceeded out of mouth :” but no sooner did he touch a string that was not quite in harmony with their national and their provincial pride, than, as if by a touch of magic, all was, in an instant, indignation and wrath, and he is hurried to the brow of a precipice, to be cast down headlong. Yet ought we always, notwithstanding this, as far as is consistent with fidelity to the interests of truth, to choose acceptable and ingratiating words, such as may disarm resentment, give assurance of goodwill, and obtain for whatever we may have to say a fair and favourable hearing. “Let your speech be always with grace.”

If “the lips of a fool swallow up himself,” by bringing upon him the resentment of men, and laying him open to varied mischief; there is a higher and more alarming sense in which the expression will be found to hold true. When men speak against God; when they “contradict and blaspheme” his testimony; when they talk of his threatenings with bravado scorn, and with sneering contempt of the invitations of his mercy; their words are the words of folly, and they are words which in the end will prove their infallible and irremediable ruin. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, (saying,) Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in

derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.” “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard (speeches) which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”* Ah! *then* indeed “the lips of the fool will swallow up himself.” He will be found to have employed them against his own life. Having despised and rejected the offered mercy of God in this world; instead of “gracious” words from the lips of the “meek and lowly” Redeemer, he shall hear the fearful sentence of the righteous and offended Judge, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

As it is our incumbent duty to seek, by all lawful means, the good of our country, let it be our prayer to Him who “has the hearts of all in his hand,” and who “giveth to man understanding,” that its kings, and princes, and nobles, may be men at once of ability, of integrity, and of public and private virtue; men, like those of Issachar, “having understanding of the times, to know what ought to be done:” that its “officers may be peace, and its exactors righteousness,”—“fearing God,

* Psal. ii. 2—5. Jude 14, 15.

and hating covetousness :”—that thus, under the smile and blessing of the Most High, it may be well with our beloved country, both now, and in generations yet to come.

My Christian brethren,—in the spiritual kingdom of which we are subjects, the King is “the holy One and the just,” infinite in wisdom and knowledge, as well as in holiness and grace. No “woe” can ever be sounded against Zion on account of the character of *her* King. It combines in it every excellence than can engage the loyalty of his subjects, and ensure the prosperity of his government. “Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins :—and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears ; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth : and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.” Nothing can go wrong under an administration like this ; in which infinite goodness is directed by infinite wisdom, and the purposes of both are effected by infinite power. “The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.—In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.” For this just, and good, and wise, and mighty King shall reign for ever. His sceptre is intransferable. “His dominion is an

everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." No curses of his government escape the lips, or are formed in the hearts, of his happy subjects. "Men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed."

Remember further, my brethren, that the saying in the eighteenth verse, respecting the evil tendencies of indolence and sloth, is applicable, in the full emphasis of it, to spiritual as well as to temporal things. Spiritual riches are acquired by diligence and vigilance; and spiritual declension and poverty are the natural and invariable results of negligence in the use of those means which God has appointed for the preservation and advancement of the Divine life in the soul. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The word and ordinances of God are the means. They must be used with constancy and application of mind, with the earnestness which arises from pleasure, with a fervent desire to profit by them, and, in order to this, with believing prayer for Divine influence to attend them all with efficacy.

Exertion is also necessary, combined and unwearied exertion, for maintaining and building up the spiritual house or temple of the living God. It is true that, in one sense, this is the work of the great Architect alone:—"Not by might, nor

by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." "Behold the man whose name (is) THE BRANCH: and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: even he shall build the temple of the Lord, and he shall bear the glory."* But the Master Builder employs workmen. He carries on his designs by the instrumentality of human agents,—by the efforts of his people, and especially of his faithful servants in the ministry of the word. Let not our hearts then be reluctant, and let not our hands be slack. Let not this building decay by your slothfulness; let not this house drop through, through the idleness of your hands. Let it not be said, If Zion prospers, it is not by *your* means. The work is excellent and honourable, involving the glory of God and the highest interests of men. Let every one be emulous to place a "living stone" in the spiritual Temple; not merely to contemplate its progress with pleasure, but to help it forward with zeal; till, rising in all its loveliness, and in all its grandeur, it is at length completed, and the top-stone brought forth with shoutings—"Grace, grace, unto it!"

Let me conclude, by reminding sinners, that if there be hazard in the most secret imaginations and whispers of rebellion against an earthly monarch, the peril must be incomparably more imminent, that arises from every deed, or word, or

* Zech. iv. 6. vi. 12.

thought, of insubordination to the “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Nothing can escape HIM. The unuttered devices of the heart lie naked to his inspection. He “seeth in secret.” “Hell is open before him, and destruction hath no covering.” “There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.”

“Who can resist th’ almighty arm
That made the starry sky?
Or who elude the certain glance
Of God’s all-seeing eye?”

He needs no “bird of the air to carry the voice, or that which hath wings to tell the matter.” “His eyes run to and fro through the whole earth, beholding the evil and the good.” His ear is ever open. He slumbers not nor sleeps. And what he sees and hears is recorded in a mind by which nothing is forgotten, and nothing, amidst the infinite multiplicity of its remembrances, diminished in certainty or in accuracy, by the lapse of time. —“Curse not THIS KING, no, not in thy thought.” Your curses cannot injure Him: but his curse coming down upon you, will sink you to the lowest hell.

LECTURE XXI.

ECCLES. xi. 1—8.

1 “Cast thy bread upon the waters : for thou shalt find it
2 after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to
eight ; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the
3 earth. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty (them-
selves) upon the earth : and if the tree fall toward the
south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree
4 falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind
shall not sow ; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not
5 reap. As thou knowest not what (is) the way of the
spirit, (nor) how the bones (do grow) in the womb of her
that is with child ; even so thou knowest not the works of
6 God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and
in the evening withhold not thine hand : for thou knowest
not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether
7 they both (shall be) alike good. Truly the light (is) sweet,
and a pleasant (thing it is) for the eyes to behold the
8 sun : but if a man live many years, (and) rejoice in them
all ; yet let him remember the days of darkness ; for they
shall be many. All that cometh (is) vanity.”

SEVERAL times, in the preceding part of this book, we have found Solomon speaking of the proper way of enjoying the bounties of Divine providence, with gratitude, cheerfulness, and moderation ; oc-

casionaly hinting at the use which ought to be made of them for the temporal and spiritual benefit of others. "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and to do good in his life."—On this latter topic he enlarges in this chapter; exhibiting, in various and very interesting and beautiful lights, the virtue of benevolence, and the motives to its practical cultivation.

The passage, I am aware, has by some been applied to the virtue of *industry*, rather than of liberality; and this view of it has been supported by plausible reasons, and ingenious criticisms. I am satisfied, however, that the ordinary interpretation is preferable; that in a treatise on the sources of happiness, it is but reasonable to expect some special notice of the duties and rewards of benevolence; and that to this the figurative illustrations are admirably appropriate.

If a man were seen scattering corn on the surface of water that had inundated and overspread the fields, it might appear the act of a fool; the witless waste and unwarrantable destruction of the "precious seed." But the seed, on the inundation subsiding, might be deposited in a loamy and fertile bed, might spring up in rich luxuriance, and yield in future days a produce of a hundred fold. To some such practice as this, there seems to be a beautiful allusion in the opening of this chapter:

Verse 1. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days."

The word in this verse translated "bread" is, in Isaiah xxviii. 28. rendered "bread-corn:"—"Bread-(corn) is bruised, because he will not ever be thrashing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen." The same is evidently the meaning of it here.—Some, indeed, have fancied that the *absolute hopelessness* of "casting *bread* upon the face of the waters," is designed to represent the duty of beneficence and liberality even where there does not exist the slightest prospect of a return; and they object to the view I am now giving of the allusion, that the man who, in the case supposed, scatters his seed-corn on the waters, does it with an express view to a future crop.—But is this really a well-founded objection? It is true that it is our duty to "do good and lend, *hoping for nothing again*,"—that is, for no return from the objects of our kindness. But this does not preclude our "having respect unto the recompense of the reward" from a higher quarter. Nay, the prospect of an increase to ourselves, in temporal or spiritual good, is, in almost all the passages that inculcate liberality, held out as an encouragement to the practice of the duty.—"Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst

out with new wine.” “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth to the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.” “When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor (thy) rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed: for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.” “But this (I say), He who soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he who soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”*—The obvious meaning of all such passages is, that the liberal distribution of the bountiful, prompted and regulated by scriptural principles, will, in one form or another, yield him a profitable result: for “God (is) not unrighteous,” says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward

* Prov. iii. 9, 10, xix. 17. Luke xiv. 12—14. 2 Cor. ix. 6.

1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

his Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”*—The very same motive is presented in the verse before us: “Cast thy bread-corn on the waters: FOR thou shalt find it after many days.” It may not always yield to you in this world a return in kind; but it is not forgotten of God; it is not lost. Every work of charity performed, every gift of charity bestowed, by his people, from love to his name and regard to his glory, is remembered by him for good. The charity which he delights in and rewards, is not, indeed, that which plumes itself on its doings as acts of merit, and distributes its alms as purchase-money for heaven. It is that which, disowning all self-confidence and self-glorying, is influenced by humble and lively gratitude for the riches of Divine mercy, gives freely because it has freely received, testifying its thankfulness for the grace of Him, who “though he was rich for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.” It “does good to all as it has opportunity, especially to those who are of the household of faith;” and whatever is done to his disciples for his sake, the blessed Redeemer will at last acknowledge as having been done to himself:—“I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto

* Heb. vi. 10.

me.” And when the righteous, of whom so very small a proportion enjoyed the opportunity of performing acts of kindness to himself in person, are represented as expressing their surprise at his language,—“ Lord, when saw we *thee* hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we *thee* a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we *thee* sick or in prison and came unto thee?”—he explains his words on the principle that has been mentioned, of identifying himself with his people, whom “ he is not ashamed to call his brethren :”—“ Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto ME.”*

Our liberality ought to be as widely diffusive, as the measure of our prosperity will admit :—Verse 2. “ Give a portion to seven and also to eight ; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.”

“ Give a *portion* :”—The expression is borrowed, either from the custom of masters of feasts sending portions from before them to the different guests at table ; as when Joseph *sent messes* to his brethren, distinguishing Benjamin above the rest by the largeness of the supply allotted to him :†—or from the practice, on festive occasions, of distributing gratuitously to the poor. “ Go your way,” said Nehemiah to the Israelites, “ eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and *send portions* unto them for whom nothing is prepared ; for (this) day (is) holy unto

* Matt. xxv. 34—40.

† Gen. xliii. 34.

our Lord: neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”* The Jews commemorated their providential deliverance from the exterminating vengeance of Haman, by “days of feasting and joy, and of *sending portions* one to another, and *gifts to the poor*.”†—“Give a portion *to seven, and also to eight* :”—that is, sow bountifully, and not sparingly. You are in danger of keeping within, rather than of going beyond, the proper boundaries. You should, therefore, be jealous over yourselves, and allow none to go unprovided for whom it is in your power to supply. *Seven* is one of the numbers significant in scripture phraseology of abundance and completeness. Go beyond it, rather than keep within it; leaning to the side on which you are naturally, from the selfish tendencies of the heart, most prone to err.

This cheerful and diffusive liberality is further enforced by another and a very powerful consideration:—“for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.”—This uncertainty of human affairs has been frequently noticed, in different connections, in the preceding part of this book. It forms, indeed, one of its principal themes. The present may be a season of prosperity; but it may very soon be succeeded by a time of calamity and distress; and our ignorance of what is coming should lead us to make a proper use of the bounty of Heaven whilst it remains in our possession:—for

* Neh. viii. 10.

† Esth. ix. 22.

In the first place, we may soon, in Divine providence, be deprived of the means, and consequently of the ability, of doing good.—No man, therefore, should look forward to a time when he will begin to lay out his substance for benevolent purposes; but each should use what he has *now*. The contrary indicates a want of disposition, which is not very likely to leave him when his own convenient time arrives; and long too ere that time comes, his riches may “make to themselves wings, and fly away as an eagle towards heaven.”

Secondly. When this does happen, it becomes a sad reflection, a melancholy addition to a man's unhappiness, that he has not, during his period of prosperity, been making a proper use of the means of good put into his hands,—the use of them enjoined by the Giver;—that he has selfishly wrapt up his talent in a napkin, and kept it close from the poor and needy,—till it is gone,—unexpectedly gone, and his opportunities irredeemably lost. The opposite reflection is an animating support to the mind under the most impoverishing and depressing bereavements; when, in proportion to the extent of our means, we can say with Job,—“When the ear heard (me), then it blessed me; and when the eye saw (me), it bare witness unto me: because I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless also, and (him that had) none to help him: the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.—

I was eyes to the blind, and feet (was) I to the lame. I (was) a father to the poor.”*

Thirdly. It is frequently of consequence to us, to secure friends in the time of our prosperity, against the day of possible calamity and suffering.—It sometimes happens, that entire reverses take place in the circumstances of men; and that he who has assisted and relieved others, requires relief and assistance from the very objects of his kindness. It appears to be to such vicissitudes in human condition that Paul refers, when, exhorting the Christians at Corinth to liberality in their contributions for the poor saints who were at Jerusalem, he says to them: “For (I mean) not that other men be eased, and you burdened: but by an equality, (that) now at this time your abundance (may be a supply) for their want, that their abundance also may be (a supply) for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, He that (had gathered) much had nothing over, and he that (had gathered) little had no lack:”†—every man who, in the collecting of the manna, to which the last expression alludes, was found, in the general measurement, to have gathered more than the daily allowance of an omer for each member of his household, supplying by his superfluity the deficiency of his neighbours.—By the benevolent appropriation of a part of our substance, friends may be acquired, whose grateful services may, at a future time, and

* Job xxix. 11—13, 15, 16. . . . † 2 Cor. viii. 13—15.

in altered circumstances, be of essential benefit to us. And if, in our time of need, they should disappoint us, and give us to experience the bitterness of ingratitude, still we shall be able to look up with confidence to the Author of our blessings and our trials; whose providence will not forsake or leave destitute those who had endeavoured to act as faithful stewards of his bounty, so long as he had been pleased to continue it with them.

In what opposite ways may the same consideration be applied! The very circumstance which Solomon here urges as a reason for present and generous liberality, the covetous worldly-minded man pleads as an apology for *hoarding*. I know not, he says, “what evil may come upon the earth:” I must, therefore, take good care of what I have got. I must reserve it to meet the contingencies of futurity. Who can tell but I may otherwise come to dependence, and die poor myself?—A prudent precaution, to prevent our becoming a burden upon others in the time of age and infirmity, is by no means to be condemned. But it is an awful perversion, when the apprehension of future possibilities is made an excuse for griping avarice. How much more noble the use that is made, by the Spirit of God, of our ignorance of the future! Instead of withholding from others on this ground, says Solomon,—rather give while you have to give,—and give liberally;—lose not the precious opportunity;—“it is more blessed to give than to

receive ;"—enjoy, then, the pleasure of present beneficence ;—"give a portion to seven, and also to eight ; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth."

He then, by a very beautiful figure, illustrates the duty of the man who enjoys the munificence of heaven :—Verse 3. "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty (themselves) upon the earth."

From earth, and seas, and lakes, and rivers, the sun exhales immense quantities of watery vapours. These condense in the atmosphere into clouds ; and the clouds do not retain their precious treasure, but, agreeably to the kind intention of the wonder-working Author of nature, discharge their contents upon the earth in refreshing and fertilizing showers. A bountiful man is a "cloud full of rain" to the parched wilderness of poverty. A parsimonious niggard is a "cloud without water," yielding nothing but disappointment and mortification to the anxious expectant of a blessing. In the sultry climate of the East, a cloud charged with rain is sometimes inexpressibly precious. The very look, the very thought of it, is refreshment. And as the clouds are formed, by the provision of nature, for the express purpose of watering the earth, so is the bounty of providence bestowed on men, not merely for themselves, but "that they may have to give to him that needeth." They receive, that they may impart. They are blessed, that they may be a blessing.

The meaning of the remaining clause of the same verse is not so obvious:—"and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be."—These words are very commonly used to express the sentiment, that whatever character belongs to a man when he quits the world, that character he must retain; there can be no subsequent change: as death finds him it finally fixes him; pronouncing the sentence, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still."—This yields a good sense; and one by no means remote from the general scope of the passage. The possessor of heaven's bounty, is reminded that he must fall before the stroke of death; that when he does fall, his state is for ever fixed, according to his character and works while he lived: and a motive is thus set before him to benevolent activity and pious effort, drawn from the uncertainty of life, and from the fearful consequences of being taken away amidst a course of selfish prosperity and worldly-mindedness, of large promises, it may be, for the future, and entire neglect of present duty, and having his state fixed for ever, beyond the possibility of change or remedy.

From the connection, however, the general import of the figure seems rather to be, the security of a return to the man of principled beneficence.—

In whatever quarter thy bounty is dispersed, thou shalt find it again. As where the tree falls it lies,—so thy charity is not lost. Give in all directions; for thou shalt find it again:—thy recompense is secure. It is the same sentiment, otherwise expressed, with that in the first verse,—“for thou shalt find it after many days.”

This is a subject, respecting which men are ever disposed to find, and ingenious at inventing, excuses. Their circumstances, their families, their necessary expenditure, the uncertainties of business, the ingratitude and the vices of the poor,—and especially their fears about what may happen;—these, with other apologies, they plead to themselves and to one another, for not giving, or at least for not giving *now*,—for satisfying themselves at present with *hoping* what they may be able to do hereafter,—for transacting the business of charity, not by cash payments, but by promissory notes at distant dates, which, when the time of demand arrives, they find fresh excuses for renewing.—It is against the timid withholders of present charity, that the fourth verse is directed:—

“He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.”—The husbandman must take his seed-time and harvest as they are sent to him by the God of the seasons. The weather is not in his choice. If he minds every cold wind that blows, or every cloud that gathers in the sky and threatens a shower, he may lose both

his spring and his autumn. Day after day may pass, while he is marking the direction of the wind, and gazing on the face of the sky, in timid hesitation whether he may safely scatter his seed, or put in his sickle; till the proper season is gone, and leaves him nothing but fruitless regrets that he cannot recall it.—The lesson taught by the comparison is, that we should fulfil the duties of benevolence when it is in our power; embracing with alacrity every opportunity of doing good; not startled and prevented by every little circumstance that may occasion inconvenience or apprehension; deferring, and deferring, from excessive scrupulosity, and morbid fearfulness of possible mistakes and impositions, till our opportunities of usefulness are irrecoverably gone.

But let not this principle be pushed to an extreme. Let it not be considered as entirely precluding the exercise of prudence and caution. In the whole of the business of life these are serviceable, and in few things more so than in the practice of benevolence. The farmer, although he cannot always get weather in every respect to his mind, will not, however, purposely choose an unfavourable day, either for sowing or for reaping. So ought we to select our objects and our opportunities to the best advantage, lest we should bestow charity that will be unproductive of good, or even fruitful of evil,—being conferred on improper per-

sons, at unseasonable times, or in an unsuitable manner.

We ought especially to beware of allowing our fears about the future, to preponderate against the sense of present duty; for this kind of irresolute apprehensiveness would lead us to refrain from doing any thing that promises to be productive of good, because in every case there is a *possibility* of failure,—the future arrangements of providence being entirely beyond our penetration:—

Verse 5. “As thou knowest not what (is) the way of the spirit, (nor) how the bones (do grow) in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.”

By “the way of the spirit,” some understand the way of the *wind*. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whether it goeth.” And this being used by our Lord as an emblem of the mysterious operations of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men,—(“So is every one that is born of the Spirit,”)—to these operations the expression before us has by others been conceived to refer.—I am inclined to think, however, that “the spirit” here means, neither the wind, nor the Holy Ghost, but the *human soul*. Its connection with what follows in the verse, gives more than probability to this interpretation. “Thou knowest

not the way of the spirit, (nor) how the bones (do grow) in the womb of her that is with child." The formation and growth of the human foetus in the womb, is one of those secret wonders of nature, of which there are so many, that elude our penetration. Anatomical skill, indeed, may ascertain many facts respecting the successive stages of its progress from conception to maturity; but questions might still be asked, to which the most experienced anatomist could give no reply but an acknowledgment of his ignorance. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made." The structure of our frame, so "curiously wrought," so singularly complicated, so exquisitely adapted in all its parts to all its functions, is one of the most marvellous products of the wisdom of Divine contrivance, and the power and skill of Divine operation. The beautiful provision made for the sustenance and growth of the embryo man by the system of foetal circulation,—the entrance of the principle of animal life, indicated by its first faint fluttering movement,—and the gradual increase of living vigour, till, by the pangs of parturition, it is thrown from its prison, utters its first cry, and draws for itself the vital air of heaven;—all is full of mystery and wonder.—But there is another secret. When, and whence, cometh "the spirit?"—the immortal soul? At what time does it take possession of its tenement? Does it enter with the principle of animal life, when the infant first stirs in the womb?—or does it unite itself with the body

at the moment of its birth into the world?—To such inquiries we can return no certain answer. We neither know “the way of the spirit,” nor “how the bones (do grow) in the womb of her that is with child.” The very union itself of immaterial and invisible spirit with gross corporeal substance, has been, is, and ever will be, incomprehensible by our feeble reason; and the time and the manner of their first coalition is alike a mystery.

“Even so thou knowest not the works of God, who maketh all.”—We may apply this particularly to the subject of the preceding verses, or more generally to the various departments of the Divine procedure. There are wonders in providence, as well as in creation. God has singular ways of working in both. You may say,—We cannot tell how we are to obtain any return for our liberality;—we cannot imagine, how giving away should fail to make us poorer,—how, by scattering, our substance should increase. But God’s ways are not your ways. He effects his purposes by hidden arrangements, that are promoting their ends even when to you they may seem for the time to counteract them, and that bring about events altogether out of the range of human expectation. In your ignorance of the Divine administration, your best course is to discharge your duty with cheerfulness, and without fruitless anxieties and apprehensions, confiding in his wisdom, faithfulness, and love, “committing

your way unto him, and trusting in him, that he will bring it to pass," using whatever measure of his bounty he bestows upon you, according to his own directions, without reserve and without fear of the issue. A proper feeling of reverence for God, who "doeth great things past finding out, yea, and marvellous things without number," should lead us to this implicit obedience and implicit reliance. "There is no searching of his understanding." "O the depth of the riches, and wisdom, and knowledge of God! How unsearchable (are) his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Every good, and especially every benevolent action, dictated by the principles of the word of God, is sowing seed for a future harvest: and true wisdom consists in doing this daily,—constantly,—losing no time, no opportunity:—Verse 6. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both (shall be) alike good."

Many of our attempts at good may fail of the desired end; and some of them may even produce results opposite to our intentions. But such occurrences should not discourage us. Let them dictate prudence, but never inspire despondency. Let them direct our efforts, but by no means slacken them. If the sowing of the morning fails, that of the evening may yield a crop; and we cannot previously tell but that both may be equally productive. We

cannot ascertain beforehand, which of our endeavours is to be most successful, nor can we be certain as to any one of them, that it will not prosper.—We may be tempted to try nothing, by the morbid apprehension of failure. The better course is to calculate on some of our attempts failing, and on this account, that we may have the greater probability of succeeding in some, to make them the more numerous; whilst, at the same time, we bring to bear upon every one of them the entire amount of prudence and forethought we possess, that, as far as lieth in us, we may ensure a favourable issue to them all. We shall then fulfil, in its true spirit, the direction contained in this verse.—“Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”*

It ought further to be remembered, that even if all our designs and schemes of usefulness should, by unforeseen circumstances, be frustrated; yet, having been in our hearts, and having been attempted from right motives, even from the principles of benevolence and piety, they are, in the estimate of God, the same as if they had been attended with the most perfect success. Men are exceedingly apt to form their judgment of actions according to the issue of them. But He who “searcheth the heart” “judgeth righteous judgment;” and even

* Gal. vi. 9, 10.

of the good intention, to which his providence denies accomplishment, he says to its projector, "Thou didst well that it was in thy heart."

It is natural, that men should desire prosperity:—Verse 7. "Truly the light (is) sweet, and a pleasant (thing it is) for the eyes to behold the sun."—Light is a beautiful emblem of happiness or joy. We at once, by a kind of instinctive association, connect with it the idea of cheerfulness and pleasure, and that of melancholy and mourning with darkness. This is so natural, so accordant with universal feeling, that the figure is, I suppose, common to all languages. It occurs frequently in the scriptures. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness shall be as the noon-day." "The light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him." "The light of God's countenance" is the cheering influence of his favour; and to express the uninterrupted joy of the heavenly state, the absence of those alternations of gladness and gloom that characterize the present life, it is beautifully said, "There shall be no night there." It is "the inheritance of the saints in light." The heavenly city, seen by John in the visions of God, "had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to

shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb was the light thereof."

But desirable as prosperity is, it cannot be secured. This world is, in every man's experience, although in very various proportions, a scene of alternate light and shade, clouds and sunshine:—Verse 8. "But if a man live many years, (and) rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh (is) vanity."

Long continued prosperity is very dangerous to its possessor. It is apt to make him forget himself; to seduce his affections from better things, and to lead him to say within himself, "This is my rest." But however long and uninterruptedly prosperity may have been enjoyed, its continuance, even for a day longer, can never be counted upon. "Days of darkness" may be near, when a man is least apprehending their approach. The day that has gratified his utmost wishes may be the day that gives beginning to disappointments and troubles. The sun of his prosperity may be eclipsed in its meridian altitude. The moment that has cleared his sky of its only remaining cloud, may be the moment that gives indications of the coming storm.—And as the days of darkness may be near when least anticipated, they may also be "many," in proportion to the number of the previous days of light. Often has lasting prosperity been succeeded by protracted affliction; many days of sunshine and

gladness by many of “darkness and gloominess, of clouds and thick darkness.”—Let no man, therefore, say, “I shall not be moved; for I shall never be in adversity.” Job, in the season of his felicity and glory, when “the candle of the Lord shined upon his head, and by his light he walked through darkness,”—when, according to another of his beautiful figures, “his root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon his branch,”—Job then said, “I shall die in my nest, I shall multiply my days as the sand.” But while he was saying so, unthought-of troubles were gathering round him. The predatory bands of the Sabeans and Chaldeans were on their march, to drive off his herds, and murder his servants;—the “fire of God” was falling from heaven, and consuming his flocks with their shepherds;—and the “great wind from the wilderness” was smiting the four corners of the “house of feasting,” and burying in its ruins his entire family, his “seven sons and his three daughters!” While he was saying so, the intelligence came, that laid him among the ashes, an agonized and desolate mourner, with his head shaven, and his mantle torn;—the commencement of “wearisome days,” and “months of vanity,” during which “his harp was turned to mourning, and his organ to the voice of them that weep.”—The man who never anticipates and expects trouble must be but ill prepared to stand it when it comes. And since “all that cometh is vanity;”

since our joys are precarious and transient; since we cannot say with effect to the sun of our prosperity, "Stand thou still," when a higher authority commands it to decline into the twilight of fear, and the night of darkness and sorrow;—O how unutterably foolish is the man who trusts to this vanity, and calculates on no reverse!

As a part of the improvement of these verses, my friends, allow me, *in the first place*, to extend a little this thought, of the succession of "days of darkness" to days of light and prosperity. Although such days should not at all overtake the prosperous worldling during his earthly life;—though his entire course here below should be marked by success in all his pursuits, and the fulfilment of all his wishes; yet, ah! if he dies, as he has lived, "a man of the world, who has his portion in this life," days of darkness,—many days of darkness,—an eternity of darkness, awaits him. When the light of his earthly prosperity is extinguished, it must be succeeded by "the blackness of darkness for ever." O then, how much more blessed is the poorest of the children of God, who, though his "days of darkness" on earth be "many," possesses, amidst the deepest of their gloom, "a joy with which a stranger cannot intermeddle,"—a "good portion, that shall not be taken away from him,"—a "treasure in the heavens that faileth not;"—who, in the midst of darkness, has light from the Lord; and who has the prospect of that land of light,—of

knowledge, and purity, and bliss,—where “the days of his mourning shall be ended,”—where the “Lord shall be his everlasting light, and his God his glory!”—Jesus “lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed (are ye) poor; for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed (are ye) that hunger now; for ye shall be filled. Blessed (are ye) that weep now; for ye shall laugh.—But wo unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Wo unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Wo unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.”—The “days of darkness” in this world *may* come; but if you live and die without God, the days of darkness of which I now speak *must* come. As to this there is no uncertainty. It is sure as the word and oath of the God of truth. All the impenitent enemies of God and his Son, all the careless neglecters of the great salvation, shall be banished from the blessed light of heaven to the darkness of hell, where no ray of gladness or of hope enlivens the perpetual gloom.

But, blessed be God, these days of everlasting darkness may be avoided. “I am the Light of the world,” says the Redeemer of men; “he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” And “truly *this* light is sweet;” sweet at all times; peculiarly sweet, in the season of adversity; shining then in the dwellings of the righteous, and making their hearts glad,

when the lights of their earthly joy are dark in their tabernacle. And it is an everlasting light,—“the light of life,”—of life eternal. If you would possess the light of true joy, you must come to the Fountain of light,—even to Him of whom it is said, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

In the second place. We should learn to consider ourselves as debtors to one another, and to our fellow-men in general, in every thing by which God puts it in our power to profit them.—Whatever be the gift we have received, it becomes our duty to “minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” The exhortation in the beginning of the chapter may be applied, in all its emphasis, to spiritual as well as to temporal things. This indeed is the peculiar province of *Christian* charity. In its efforts and sacrifices for the corporeal and other temporal comforts of men, it finds many associates amongst those who are alive to the claims of humanity and compassion, although they are destitute of religious principle:—but having learned to “seek first,” for himself, “the kingdom of God and his righteousness,”—having been taught the preciousness of the soul, and the value of eternal blessings, the Christian takes into the range of his benevolent contemplations and schemes of usefulness, the everlasting existence of the objects of his pitying regard. To leave this out of the account, is the prevalent defect of what

is extolled as benevolence amongst men; but it is the extreme of inconsistency and folly. It is infinitely more foolish, than if a man were to expend all his counsel and his pains to obtain for another the ease and comfort of an hour, whilst he wilfully disregarded what might secure the happiness of a lifetime;—or, than if a medical practitioner were to bend all his attention, and devote all his skill, to some slight topical ailment, whilst he allowed a deadly disease to prey upon the constitution, with unheeded, unmitigated, and fatal fury. The eternal salvation of sinners has been the great object of Divine benevolence; for the accomplishment of which all the wonders have been wrought of the mediation of the Son of God. It was for this that “he who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and, being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”—He who neglects the spiritual and eternal interests of men, is not of one mind with God. His benevolence is wretchedly defective and spurious. He wants the spirit of that world of love, where “there is joy over one sinner that repenteth.”

Let Christian ministers, Christian parents, teachers of sabbath-schools, and the disciples of Christ in general, in their various departments of usefulness,

be encouraged to cast the seed of spiritual instruction upon the waters. We shall find it after many days. "Be instant, in season, out of season;" not consulting, but cheerfully sacrificing, your own ease and convenience. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that; or whether they both shall be alike good." In some cases, it may be long before any of the seed begins to spring; and in others, whole fields may speedily be "white unto harvest." There is not in the spiritual the same regularity of return as in the natural world. Sometimes, the seed is no sooner sown than the blade appears, and is rapidly succeeded by "the ear and the full corn in the ear." At other times, it may lie in the soil till you think it must be rotten, and sigh over it as lost; and when hope is gone, and you have given up all thoughts of its ever appearing, that may be the very moment when the principle of life from God quickens the germ, and surprises and delights you with the unexpected beauties of spiritual vegetation.

In the spiritual, as in the natural world, "it is God that giveth the increase." It was so, when Paul planted, and Apollos watered; and it is so still. "Neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." But an increase from the seed of the word is graciously promised:—"As the rain com-

eth down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and prosper (in the thing) whereto I sent it.”*—When we sow our seed, therefore, let our prayers ascend for the quickening influences of heaven; and when any increase appears, let our acknowledgments be made for those influences to the God of all grace. The prayer of faith shall not be unanswered; the exertions of zeal shall not be unblest; the seed-time of instruction shall be followed by a harvest of the “fruits of righteousness;” the “work and labour of love” shall not be forgotten of Him for whose sake and to the glory of whose name it is done.

And, my Christian brethren, if a portion of your worldly substance be required for the purpose of imparting the bread of life to famishing millions, will you withhold it? Will you keep it back from Him out of whose treasures you have received it; who still says, “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine;” who honours you by putting it in your power to promote his cause; who encourages you to liberality by the promise of his blessing; and who is able to “canker your gold and silver,” and cause “the rust of them to witness against you?”

* Isa. lv. 10, 11.

“Honour the Lord with your substance.” “There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.” Be not deaf to the appeals of Heaven. Let the pleading voice of the whole Heathen world be heard. Let the claims of “the seed of Abraham, God’s friend,” awaken the grateful sensibilities of your hearts, and open your hands to liberality. Seize the present opportunity. Let it not pass unimproved. Seek not after apologies for refusal. Cover not a grudging disposition by plausible objections. Let not Conscience be bribed and cajoled by Avarice. Put not to the credit of prudence and principle what belongs to the account of hardhearted selfishness, and the “love of this present world.” Allow no imaginary obstacles, or trifling difficulties, to bar the present exercise of your Christian generosity. “Cast your bread-corn on the face of the waters.” “Give a portion to seven and also to eight.”—How powerful is the Divine expostulation with Israel by the prophet Haggai! Hear it, with an awakened conscience and a willing mind. “(Is it) time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house (lie) waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages (to put it) into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. Go up to the

mountain, and bring wood, and build the house ; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. Ye looked for much, and, lo, (it came) to little ; and when ye brought (it) home, I did blow upon it. Why ? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that (is) waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed (from) her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon (that) which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.”* Mark also the promise of blessing attending their compliance with the expostulation, and derive from it the encouragement it is fitted to give :—“ And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord ; since those (days) were, when (one) came to a heap of twenty (measures), there were (but) ten : when (one) came to the press-fat, for to draw out fifty (vessels) out of the press, there were (but) twenty. I smote you with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labours of your hands ; yet ye (turned) not to me, saith the Lord. Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth (month, even) from the day that the foundation of the Lord’s

* Hag. i. 4—11.

temple was laid, consider (it). Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig-tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive-tree, hath not brought forth: FROM THIS DAY WILL I BLESS YOU.*

* Hag. ii. 15—19.

LECTURE XXII.

ECCLES. xi. 9, 10. xii. 1—7.

9 “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these (things) God will bring thee into
10 judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth (are) vanity.”

1 “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in
2 them; While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the
3 rain: In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look
4 out of the windows be darkened; And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low; and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird; and all the
5 daughters of music shall be brought low: Also (when) they shall be afraid of (that which is) high, and fears (shall be) in the way, and the almond-tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go

6 *about the streets : Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern : Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was ; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."*

OF all the seasons of life, youth is the one in which we are least disposed to anticipate " days of darkness." The spirits are then light and buoyant, and the heart dances to the notes of pleasure. The blood is warm ; the passions are ardent ; the inward pleadings for their indulgence are powerful ; restraint is felt to be irksome, and is esteemed unreasonable ; the counsels of age are apt to be disregarded, as coming from those who have themselves enjoyed their youth, and who, being now incapable of its pleasures, would ungenerously deny them to others. These counsels may be the result even of dear-bought experience, and the dictate of the sincerest affection. But youth is incredulous of evil ; never disposed to take it upon trust from others that " all is vanity," but determined to make the trial for itself. Feeling that there are pleasures in sin, it flatters itself with the persuasion, that the young at least may be allowed a little licence. Impelled by inward propensities, and solicited by outward temptations, it pursues its course of indulgence. What the bible condemns as dangerous and ruinous sins, it learns to call by the palliative names of juvenile levities, irregularities, indiscretions ; and laughs away reflection, as the business of maturer age.

Well aware of the character and natural propensities of youth, Solomon, turning himself to the young, as he was naturally led to do by the tenor of the preceding verse, frames his address accordingly:—"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these (things) God will bring thee into judgment."

This, as I hinted in a former lecture, is most naturally interpreted as the language of serious and awakening irony. Some of the terms are such as will not bear to be explained of that innocent cheerfulness, and chastened indulgence, which alone could be directly recommended either to childhood, or youth, or manhood.—"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth." Take thy pleasure. Pursue whatever course inclination suggests to thee. Trouble not thyself with reflections or with anticipations; but yield to present impulses, and spend a merry life. Give thyself no concern about what may please God. Please thyself. "Withhold not thy heart from any joy." Follow the tide of thy passions. And if

"—— thy pulse's madd'ning play
Wild send thee pleasure's devious way,"

do not check it; mind not moderating and reducing it; let it bound in thy veins; and give thy

youthful desires their full measure of gratification.

That Solomon means more than mere merriment, mere cheerful, unsolicitous, lighthearted jollity,—that he means the *pleasures of sin*,—is evident from the phrases which follow :—“ and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes.” The *ways of a man’s heart*, in scripture language, do not mean the ways of the renewed heart ; but the ways to which he is led by the dispositions and tendencies of the heart in its natural state, unregenerated by the grace of God :—“ For the iniquity of his covetousness,” says God concerning rebellious Israel, “ I was wroth and smote him : I hid me and was wroth ; and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.” To “ walk in the sight of the eyes,” is to pursue whatever the eyes look upon as desirable. We naturally fix our eyes on that which we value and wish for, and avert them from that which we dislike. The eyes thus become the index of the affections. Ezekiel’s wife is denominated “ the desire of his eyes.” Seeking with eagerness the precarious treasures of the world, is “ setting the eyes upon that which is not.” The “ lust of the eye,” is associated with the “ lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.” And in the second chapter of this book, Solomon expresses the unrestrained gratification which he gave to all his propensities in these words, “ whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them ; I withheld not my heart from any

joy." It is one of the prayers of his pious father, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." The ways of the heart, and the sight of the eyes, are sometimes united to signify the practical indulgence of evil tendencies. In delivering the Divine injunction to the Israelites respecting the fringes of their garments, Moses says to them: "And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not *after your own heart*, and *your own eyes*, after which ye use to go a whoring."*—Enjoy thyself, then, says Solomon. Let thy heart follow thine eye, and thine eye thy heart. Rove at pleasure amidst all the scenes of youthful indulgence. While "the days of thy youth" continue, give the reins to thy lusts, and satiate thyself with whatever thy heart fancies.

This is counsel, which the young would like very well to understand as given them in good earnest. But so given, it would be counsel very inconsistent with the whole tenor and design of this book. Solomon takes a higher aim. His object is, to entice the young to purer, and nobler, and more lasting joys; and he immediately checks the indulgences of time, by pointing to eternity. He draws in the rein, which he seemed to throw loose. He damps the fire which he appeared to kindle. He exhibits a youth, giving himself up to all the gaieties, and all the licentious pleasures of the world, and in the

* Numb. xv. 39.

midst of the scene of mirth and revelry, he suddenly startles his ear, and thrills his heart with the summons to the tribunal of God. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: BUT KNOW THOU that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

This is very solemn.—Go on, young man. Pursue thy career of pleasure. Give thy heart all its desires. But—count the cost. Anticipate what is before thee. Remember, thou hast an account to give. Think of the awful realities of a coming judgment:—and then,—with these before thine eye,—follow thy present course, *if thou canst*.—Thou mayest have many companions in thy career of thoughtlessness and sensuality. But O forget not, "God will bring *thee* into judgment." Think of thyself. Thine own personal concern in the transactions of that day will be as sure, as if thou wert to be the sole culprit,—the only prisoner at the bar,—as if all creatures were swept from existence but thyself.—"*Know* thou" this. Be assured of it. "God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness." Let conscience speak freely, and it will ratify the assurances of his word. Laugh not at the warning. I know that young men are disposed to treat every thought of such a subject as a gloomy intruder on their pleasures;—I know that the problem of hap-

piness is, how such thoughts may be most effectually and constantly excluded from the mind ;—and I know that the man who ventures to suggest them, exposes himself to be proscribed as rude, and stigmatized as fanatical. But O beware. Listen to friendly admonition. What you are tempted to laugh at now, you will find a dread reality in the end.

This is not the language of sarcastic contempt, and heartless indifference, feeling no concern whether it is complied with or not. It is not the language of a sated sensualist, grudging you your youthful pleasures, because he can now no longer partake of them himself. It is not the language of a haughty disdainful Pharisee, who says in his heart, “ God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this youthful libertine.” It is not the language of a sour, morose religionist, who would deprive you of all enjoyment, and condemn you to perpetual austerity and gloom.—No, my young friends. It is the voice of sincere affection. It is language dictated by the experience of one, who tried the course you are running, or resolving to run. He knows it all. His heart dissolves in tenderness over the youth, whom he sees “ regarding lying vanities, and forsaking his own mercy.” The tear trembles in his eye while he addresses you. He beholds you spreading all your sails, and about to launch forth, insensible of your danger, on a sea that is full of perils ; a sea, by whose enticements

to adventure he had himself been tempted out, of which the hidden dangers are most imminent where its beauties are most alluring, whose fairest spots are surrounded with the most numerous wrecks, where his vessel had a thousand times been in jeopardy, and from which he had, as by a miracle of mercy, got back into port, in thankful amazement at his own safety. He would persuade you against running the same fearful risk,—against trying a course from which so few have returned.

To show that his end was far from being to make them miserable before the time,—to deprive them of their enjoyments and substitute nothing in their room,—to agitate their bosoms with unavailing alarms,—he adds in verse 10. “Therefore, remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth (are) vanity.”

This language is not of the same description with that in the preceding verse, “Rejoice in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth.” There is nothing in it of irony. The sorrow and the evil to be put away, are those to which the course described in the preceding verse naturally conducts the youth who pursues it. They are, he may be assured, its unfailing attendants and consequences. The admonition, therefore, is one of benevolent compassion, to avoid suffering both in body and in soul, both in time and in eternity. The course from which Solomon dissuades

was fitted, even in this world, to occasion affliction and mourning to the heart, and disease to the bodily frame. It is in warning against a life of dissolute pleasure, that Solomon elsewhere urges these motives on the attention of youth :—"lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel ; lest strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labours (be) in the house of a stranger ; and thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof ; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me !"* And such a course not only leads to bodily suffering and anguish of spirit in this world, but will infallibly "destroy both soul and body in hell."

He then adduces a *motive* to compliance with his admonition, and afterwards prescribes the *means* of its fulfilment.—The motive is, the constant precariousness of life at every period of it, even in the season of its greatest vigour, and under its fairest and most flattering appearances: "childhood and youth are vanity." The young are naturally disposed to promise themselves long life,—to count upon many days. Age, they know, must be near the grave ; but they have abundance of time before them,—plenty of leisure to think about the life to come, before the present life shall come to a close. But, alas ! *vanity* is inscribed on

* Prov. v. 9—13.

all the stages of our mortal course ; and dependence on its prolongation is, at every period of it, foolish and illusory. Childhood and youth are subject to vicissitude and death, as well as manhood and age. The young man who is bent on worldly pleasure is therefore seriously reminded that he “ knew not what a day might bring forth ;” that in reckoning on continued life, he was building in the air ; that death might arrest him in his career, when he least expected interruption ; and that in the state in which death found him he must give in his account, when “ God should bring him into judgment.”

The *means* of fulfilling the counsel, to “ remove sorrow from the heart, and put away evil from the flesh,” is then prescribed :—

Chap. xii. verse 1. “ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”—It is the tendency of our fallen nature to forget God ; and this tendency is peculiarly strong in youth, amidst the gaieties and allurements of a fascinating and seductive world. Forgetfulness of God is sometimes put for the whole of irreligion ; and on the same principle, the remembrance of God may comprehend all the principles and affections of practical godliness. So the phrase is used here. It is an admonition to early piety.

“ Remember thy Creator.”—Remember him, as the great Author of your being ; and spend not

the existence which he has given and which he every moment sustains, in forgetfulness of him and rebellion against him. Remember your unceasing dependence upon him for “life, and breath, and all things,” and cherish the humility that becomes dependent creatures. Remember him, as your all-bountiful Benefactor, both in providence and in redemption, the Father of mercies, the God of salvation. Remember him in all the characters in which he has been pleased to make himself known to his creatures, especially that in which it is the principal design of the bible to reveal him, as “by Jesus Christ reconciling the world unto himself,” just in justifying the ungodly, displaying in the redemption of sinners by the work of his Son, his infinite wisdom, his spotless purity, his inviolable righteousness, and his unbounded mercy, in that inseparable harmony, in which, by the necessity of his nature, they exist in his perfect character. This view of God has been given to men from the beginning with various degrees of progressive light; *salvation* having, since the entrance of sin, from the first promise downwards, been the leading subject and end of Divine revelation. Remember him, with the dispositions, the worship, the obedience, the service, that are due to him. It is affectionate, reverential, practical remembrance of him that is here recommended. Think how awful it is, that God should be so generally forgotten by his intelligent offspring; that He should

have so few of their thoughts, so little of their regards! Dare ye to be singular, by devoting yourselves to God in a world where he is so grievously dishonoured; where there are so few hearts that give him a welcome residence. Choose ye his love as your portion, his service as your employment, his glory as your end.

And “remember *now* thy Creator, *in the days of thy youth.*”—*In the first place*, because “childhood and youth are vanity;”—because life is from the first uncertain; because “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;” and if you delay, your life may close, before you have begun to be wise. The youngest amongst you, and the healthiest and most vigorous, is not sure of a day. If you do not wish, therefore, to die in forgetfulness of God, your safest way is to remember him now.—*Secondly*, because he is supremely entitled to the choicest and best, nay to the whole, of your days. He has a paramount claim upon all your time. Every day of your life is mispent, that is spent without God. Think not only of the folly, but of the impiety, of delay. You do not intend, perhaps, to spend all your days without religion. You will begin to think seriously by and by. But is not this to postpone the will of God to your own? to resolve that you will take your own pleasure now, and, when you have sated yourselves, will then give some thought to pleasing God? Is it not to say, you will devote to yourselves and to your lusts the prime and vigour of

your days, and then give to that God who made you for his glory, and to whom you owe your all, the dregs and refuse of your time? What think you of this preference of self to God? Is it not deeply impious? O be not, then, guilty of it. “Remember *now* thy Creator, in the days of thy youth.”—*Thirdly*. Your own happiness is concerned in your compliance with this counsel.—That happiness is unworthy of the name, which is disturbed by the remembrance of God. The contemplation, and enjoyment, and service of the Divine Being must be the honour and the blessedness of every rational nature. There is a propriety, a beauty, and a glory, in early piety. It shall be “an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.” And, whilst it confers honour, it imparts happiness. The ways of wisdom are “ways of pleasantness, and all her paths (are) peace. She (is) a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy (is every one) that retaineth her.” The earlier, therefore, you enter on these ways, you will have, according to the time that God may spare you, the longer period of true enjoyment;—of enjoyment, uninterrupted by the whispers of an uneasy conscience, and the scaring apprehensions of a coming judgment; of enjoyment, excellent and worthy in itself, and leaving no stings behind.

And, as early religion is the way to happiness in youth, it is also the effectual means of laying it up

for *trouble* and for *age*:—"while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

"The evil days" are the same with the "days of darkness" in the eighth verse of the preceding chapter. They are days of trouble; days of gloom and sorrow, arising from one or other, or, it may be, from a combination, of the numberless "ills that flesh is heir to." The arrival of such days, sooner or later, may be expected by all. The Divine allotments, indeed, of temporal enjoyment and suffering are exceedingly diversified, and the principle by which these degrees are measured is amongst the secrets of Deity, giving rise, in its sovereign application, to many a wondering question which we in vain attempt to answer. But every man may look for his share of trial. How few are the lives that are spent without days of darkness! And for such days, a course of mirthful and dissolute forgetfulness of God is surely a miserable preparation. Whatever may be the thoughts of men, or whatever their thoughtlessness, in the time of comfort, and health, and prosperity, the need of religion is universally felt in the season of disease, and bereavement, and wo. And, oh! it is a sad thing, when "the evil days come," and come suddenly, and our sources of consolation are yet to seek:—to seek, when perhaps we are almost, if not utterly, incapacitated for thinking, by the nature of our bodily distemper, or by the stunning,

and stupifying, and distracting influence of unanticipated distress. And would it not be righteous in an insulted and offended Deity, to deny his comforts in the season of need, to those who had slighted and refused him in the hours of their own preferred enjoyment? who, when all was going well with them, “walked in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes,” and presumptuously thought they could do without Him; and who, instead of being drawn to him by the choice of love, are driven to him by the mere force of calamity? Would there not be justice in his turning away his ear from their cry, and saying, “Because I called, and ye refused; I stretched out my hands, and no man regarded: but ye set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh?”

If you survive the “days of evil,”—if you are not cut off in youth or in manhood,—old age must come upon you; “the years must draw nigh when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them:”—that is, no pleasure from the sources which yielded it before,—no pleasure of the kind to which you gave up your earlier days. Those things which gratified your youth, and kept it in thoughtless merriment, will then lose their relish, and cease to be enjoyed; and if you have not previously “remembered your Creator,” and provided other and more enduring pleasures, alas! how cheerless will be the years of

your declining life!—Before these years draw nigh, then, lay up for them suitable enjoyment. The only satisfying pleasures, the only pleasures which will then remain, will be those of true religion. When every other spring has run dry, or its streams have become vapid or nauseous, the “wells of salvation” will continue in all their fulness, and freshness, and sweetness. The blessed truths of God will yield to the soul consolation and peace, and tranquil gladness, and animating hope. Instead of bitter and unavailing regrets for pleasures that are past and can never return, you will experience, amidst the felt exhaustion of nature, amidst the “labour and sorrow” of fourscore years, a “joy with which a stranger cannot intermeddle.” Leaning on the arm of Divine love and power, you will pass without fear through the “valley of the shadow of death,” and be “gathered to the grave, as a shock of corn, fully ripe, is brought in in his season.”

The same idea of the cheerless condition of age, without provision made for its happiness by timely piety, or rather, the view of those circumstances in age that render the supports and consolations of religion peculiarly necessary, is expanded in

Verse 2. “While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain.”

The darkening of the sun and the cheering light of day, and of the moon and stars that illuminate

and enliven the night, may be explained either literally of the dimness of vision that is incident to old age, or in one or other of two figurative senses; of the cessation of the sprightly enjoyment of the lights of heaven, in those years of which the old man says, "I have no pleasure in them;" or of the gloom of affliction, the darkness of those troubles to which age is liable, which occasion dull days and wearisome nights, sun and moon being alike shrouded in obscuring clouds. The first of these views identifies the expression in meaning with another in the subsequent description of old age,—"and those that look out of the windows be darkened." The second and third are so closely connected, that they may be considered as one,—the infirmities, and uneasinesses, and troubles of age being the principal cause of light itself ceasing to charm, and losing its quickening and spirit-stirring influence. The expression thus stands in contrast with that in the seventh verse of the preceding chapter, "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."

"The clouds returning after the rain" is a beautiful figure for a succession of troubles. Between those clouds that darken the sky of age, there is but little interval. They may rack and disperse for a short while, and the spirits be eased and lightened; but instead of the continuance of the "clear shining after rain," the clouds return, and the sky is overcast anew.—Not only do the

distresses of advanced life multiply from the enlarging circle of family connections and of "children's children," in all whose trials the old father's heart is interested; but the exhaustion of the bodily energies, and the general sinking of nature, afford little respite from varied, and sometimes indescribable, feelings of uneasiness and distress. The varieties in the condition of old men are, it is true, very considerable; and to some the description before us is much less applicable than to others. We meet at times with cases, in which, even to *fourscore* years and ten, the sky continues unusually serene, the "cloudy and dark days" being rather the exception to those of sunshine and cheerfulness. But Solomon's representation is not that of extraordinary instances, but of what may in general be expected.

The principle by which we should be guided in our interpretations of scripture, ought to be, neither predilection for what is old, nor fondness for what is new, nor the vanity of being original, but a simple regard to truth and probability. On this principle, after considering such explanations as have come in my way of the following verses, with their respective critical defences, I am satisfied that the one which has been all along the most common is the most natural; and I shall therefore, without entering at all into controversy, which would be out of place, and foreign to my purpose, in these lectures, adopt it in the comments I am now to offer you.

Verses 3—5. "In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened; and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low; and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird; and all the daughters of music shall be brought low: also (when) they shall be afraid of (that which is) high, and fears (shall be) in the way, and the almond-tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

"The keepers of the house shall tremble."—The hands and arms, the instruments of averting threatened evil, the guards and defenders of "the earthly house of this tabernacle," become feeble and palsied, constantly tremulous, or shaking with the slightest attempt at effort, and incapable of yielding it any, even the smallest, protection from assault and injury. Old age is the time of the felt cessation of power. "Cast me not off in the time of old age: forsake me not, when my strength faileth."

"And the strong men bow themselves."—The limbs, however robust they were formerly, bend under the weight of the body, tottering with extreme frailty, and unable to give it effectual support. The strong men can no longer carry their burden

from place to place : they let it fall in the attempt even to raise it.

“ And the grinders shall cease, because they are few.”—The teeth, which perform the same office to the food as the millstone to the corn, comminuting and grinding it, and preparing it for the organs of digestion, loosen and fall out ; and the few that remain become incompetent to the purpose they were wont to serve, so that the same kinds of food cannot now be taken as before, and the mastication of those which *are* taken is effected with much slowness and difficulty.

“ And those that look out of the windows be darkened.”—Another striking and affecting symptom of age,—the decay, and sometimes the total loss, of sight ; exemplified in Isaac, in Jacob, in Eli, and, in a greater or less degree, experienced by the old in general. The eyes, which from their bony sockets, as from the windows of the “ earthly house,” look out upon surrounding objects, examining the near, surveying the distant, receiving notices from without, imparting intelligence and intimating emotions from within, watching against evil and directing to good, become suffused and dim, and fail in the fulfilment of their important functions. All is obscurity and confusion. The brilliance of the light itself may be darkly seen ; but the reflection of it from the objects on which it falls is too faint to be perceptible. Children and friends approach, but the eyes, which wont to

glance with pleasure, turn not towards them; they must speak, ere they can be distinguished. Dangers are at hand; but the sentinels of the house give no alarm. Other eyes than his own must guide, and inform, and warn, the sightless old man. And he is bereft too of one of the richest sources of enjoyment,—

“———from the cheerful ways of men
Cut off, and, for the book of knowledge fair,
Presented with a universal blank
Of Nature's works, to him expung'd and raz'd,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.”

“And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low.”—There is evidently, in this particular, an allusion to the noise of the hand-mill in grinding the corn for the day, to the opening of the doors in the morning for this cheerful work, and to the lively sound of its accompanying songs. But if by the *grinders*, in the former verse, the teeth be meant; then in this verse the *grinding* must signify, under the allusion mentioned, the work which the teeth perform. The lips are in other parts of scripture, by a very natural figure, called the doors of the mouth. “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: keep *the door of my lips*.”* “Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide; keep *the doors of thy mouth* from her

* Psal. cxli. 3.

that lieth in thy bosom.”*—In the old man, when “the grinders cease,” and the “sound of the grinding is low,” the lips are compressed with a singular firmness,—the doors of the mouth shut, with a closeness that gives the countenance of age one of its most marked peculiarities.

“And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird.”—This probably expresses the general wakefulness of age. Were the interpretation consistent with the dulness of ear incident to this period of life, we might consider it as meaning that the old are easily disturbed—the slightest noise startling them. It seems rather, however, simply to signify their inability to rest. They wake early; even as soon as the cock crows, or the birds begin to chirp, in the morning: whereas, when young and vigorous, exercise prepared them for repose, and they could sleep sound and long. “Tired Nature’s sweet restorer” flies from the eyelids of age, as well as from those of wo.

“And all the daughters of music shall be brought low.”—By “the daughters of music,” I understand those organs that are employed either in the production, or in the enjoyment of it:—the lungs, which inhale the needful supply of air; that exquisitely beautiful mechanism by which the air, in its passage from the lungs, is so finely and delicately modulated; and the ear, which, by a structure not less admirable, is adapted for receiving the impres-

* Mic. vii. 5.

sions of sound, and through which the sensations of delight are conveyed to the mind. In old age, the play of the lungs is less easy, and respiration more laborious; the voice becomes tremulous and feeble; and the command of its modulation is impaired, not only by the rigidity of its own organs, but by the obtuseness of those of hearing; by which last defect too the pleasure of musical sounds is diminished, or lost. The voice is thus unfitted for making music, and the ear for enjoying it.—“I am this day,” said Barzillai the Gileadite to king David, in declining to accompany him to Jerusalem, “I am this day fourscore years old: can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing-men and singing-women? wherefore, then, should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?”*

“They shall be afraid of (that which is) high.”—Every ascent in the way, up which, in the days of their youth, they would have bounded with agility and ease, is now discouraging to them. They stop, and take breath, and hesitate, and, unable to see themselves, make many inquiries, before they will attempt what, with a desponding shake of the head, they “fear will be too much for them.”

“And fears (shall be) in the way.”—They are full of apprehensions of real or imaginary dangers,—of accidents that may happen to them,—of ob-

* 2 Sam. xix. 35.

stacles over which they may stumble,—of being jostled and thrown down, or otherwise hurt,—of mischiefs that may come in their way, which they have not eyes to see, nor strength to ward off, nor agility to escape.

“And the almond-tree shall flourish.”—From the particular time of the almond-tree’s flourishing, it has by some been placed early in spring,* whilst others have assigned it to winter.† In the latter view, it has been considered as significant, in the imagery of Solomon, of the closing scene of life, when

“ ——— pale concluding winter comes at last,
And shuts the scene.”

—But the existing dubiety about the season gives uncertainty and indistinctness to this explanation; and both on this account, and on the ground of its own superior beauty and appropriateness, the more common view of the figure is entitled to preference. The almond-tree, covered with its snow-white blossoms, is a beautiful poetic emblem of the hoary head; and the casting of the blossoms might farther represent the shedding of the silver locks from the venerable brows of age.

“And the grasshopper shall be a burden.”—By those who explain the preceding emblem from the season of the year, this also has been interpreted as referring to winter, when the grasshopper, which in

* See Cotton on the verse;—Blayney on Jer. i. 11, 12; &c.

† See Dathius and Van der Palm on the verse.

summer had been all sprightliness and agility, becomes languid and inactive, and “a burden (to itself.)” Thus it is, as they allege who adopt this explanation, with the aged man, when he experiences the feebleness of decrepitude, and is bowed down with the load of his infirmities.*—But may not the expression be intended simply to convey the idea of *extreme feebleness*? signifying, not that the old man is, like the grasshopper at a particular season, a burden to himself, although that is true; but that to the relaxed and palsied imbecility of age, *the lightest thing is a load*. Would it be an inappropriate expression for the feebleness of an unnerved and emaciated frame, to say of a man, he was become so exceedingly weak that he could not bear a fly to light upon him? This I take to be the meaning of the grasshopper being a bur-

* “*Locusta, sive cicada, per æstatem valde agilis ac læta, hyeme languet, atque ipsi sibi molesta est.*”—*Van der Palm*. It may be owing to an undue sense of the ludicrous, but I never have been able to view in any other light than as an ingenious conceit, with too little dignity in it to have been intended by Solomon, the resemblance which some have drawn, and have supposed to have been in his eye, between the shape of the grasshopper and the decrepit body of a very infirm old man.—“*Cum locusta comparatur senex, propter corpus macilentum, pedes graciles, et incessum incurvatum ac si onere premere-tur.*”—*Dathius*. He translates the words, “*locusta onerabitur,*” in Eccles. xii. 5. “the dry, shrunk, shrivelled, crumpling, craggy old man, his back bone sticking out, his knees projecting forwards, his arms backwards, his head downwards, and the apophyses, or bunching parts of the body, in general enlarged, is very aptly described by that insect.”—*Parkhurst* on the word—who refers for fuller proof of the resemblance to Dr. Smith’s *King Solomon’s portraiture of old age*.—The resemblance may be very complete; but the comparison, I confess, conveys a conception to my mind too odd and ludicrous to be willingly admitted on such a subject.

den. It is not improbable, that the phrase was a proverbial one for the utmost degree of debility.

“And desire shall fail.”—I rest in the ordinary interpretation of these words, as signifying the cessation of the desire of animal pleasures; the appetites and propensities of nature giving way with the departure of the warmth of youth, the cooling of the blood, the sinking of the animal spirits, and the general exhaustion of the energies and capacities of the living frame.

“Because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.”—The grave is man’s long, or perpetual home. As time advances, indeed, the epithets will become less and less appropriate, as the sleep of the tomb will be shorter and shorter, till the sounding of the “trump of God;” when the slumbers of centuries and the repose of a day shall be disturbed together; when righteous Abel, the earliest tenant of the tomb, shall quit the narrow house, and the breath shall at the same time return to the man who is yet warm in his shroud. But the terms were appropriate in Solomon’s days, and are so still in ours; and to all who reach the grave it must ever continue a *perpetual* home in as far as respects their return to “the place that knew them” in the present world. “When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return.” “Man lieth down, and riseth not; till the heavens be no more they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.” “As

the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more.”—Perhaps the “long home” may mean, not specifically the grave, but the *future state* in general,—the “undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns,”—where the condition of every individual is immediately and irreversibly settled.

“The mourners going about the streets” refers to the ancient eastern custom of employing official mourners, who were hired for the purpose of wailing for the dead : raising public lamentations over them ; attending at their funeral obsequies ; by dress, and voice, and gesture, and all the outward expressions of grief, moving the feelings of kindred and spectators ; and praising the excellences of the departed in dirges of plaintive music, which, in extraordinary cases, were even recorded amongst the sacred melodies of the country. Thus “the singing-men and singing-women” celebrated the virtues of good king Josiah. They “spoke of Josiah in their lamentations,” says the writer of the Chronicles, “unto this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel : and behold they are written in the Lamentations.”* To the same description of persons the prophet Jeremiah alludes, when, weeping for the slain of the daughter of his people, he says, “Thus saith the Lord, Consider ye, and

* 2 Chron. xxxv. 25.

call for the mourning women that they may come; let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters.”*

Our customs differ from theirs. We should be apt to think this kind of mercenary and factitious sorrow a burden rather than a gratification to the disconsolate spirit of bereaved and agonized affection, and likely, besides, in most instances, to be proportioned to the wealth more than to the worth of its subject. But we also have every day before our eyes the sight of “mourners,” although not of the same description, “going about the streets;” relatives and friends assuming in succession for each other the garb of sorrow. The man of grey hairs has followed many a bier in the course of his fourscore years,—has dropt his tears of tender sympathy, or of heart-broken anguish, over many a grave:—and now at length the mourners assemble for himself, and follow him to “his long home,” and commit his loved and venerated dust to the house of silence.

Various have been the interpretations of verse 6. “Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.”

The silver cord being loosed, and the golden bowl broken, have been thought to represent life under the image of a lamp of gold suspended by a

* Jer. ix. 17, 18.

cord of silver threads from the ceiling of a festive hall, enlightening and enlivening the company :—but the cord loosens or snaps asunder, the lamp falls and is broken, the light is extinguished, and all is involved in gloom.*—The remainder of the verse has been interpreted as a figure taken from the furniture of a well. The bucket and the wheel are broken: the water can no longer be drawn: and, instead of the busy and lively scene that was wont to surround the well's mouth, all is solitude and silence, the ground untrodden, the water stagnant.—The imagery of the entire verse has by others been traced to this latter source. “There is a *cord* to the *bowl*, or bucket, with which the water is drawn; a *wheel* by which the more easily to raise it; a *cistern*, into which it may be poured; and a *pitcher*, or vessel to carry it away with :—but now all are broken or loosened, and become useless.” Thus at death, all the functions of life terminate, and the entire mechanism of the human frame is shattered, and goes to decay. “The lungs cease to play, the heart ceases to beat, the blood to circulate; every vessel becomes useless; the whole surprising contrivance for forming and communicating the blood, which is the life, from the fountain of the heart to every extremity of the body, is entirely deranged: the silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl is broken, the pitcher and the wheel are alike marred.”†

* Dathius. † Scott's Commentary.

But I cannot persuade myself to dismiss this interesting description thus hastily.—One of the difficulties which we feel in the explanation of it, arises from our not being acquainted with the terms and phrases then employed in the different departments of natural science, as far as the cultivation of them extended; nor even with the names in common use, for many of the parts especially in the internal structure of the animal machine. I can hardly suppose the phraseology of Solomon here to have been entirely poetical, I mean the immediate invention of his own fancy alone, expressing resemblances that had presented themselves to his own mind, but had not at all been previously recognized in the language of ordinary life. It is well known how many of the terms and designations by which anatomists have chosen to distinguish the different organs and functions of the human frame are figurative,—borrowed from obvious or remote analogies, and likenesses to other objects and operations in nature;—and the same terms and phrases, or others framed on similar principles, are to be found in common discourse.

Suppose, then, we adopt the common explanation of the “silver cord,” (which I confess myself disposed to do) as signifying the spinal marrow,—that prolongation of the brain which comes down in the central tube of the back bone, and sends off nerves in all directions, which branch into innumerable fibres, distributed to the remotest extremities:—is it at all

necessary that we consider the name as Solomon's own,—a fine poetical image? At the risk of marring to some minds the beauty of the image, I must say that I think it more likely to have been the common name for the part of our frame in question. We can hardly conceive a designation more strikingly appropriate. The medullary *cord*, it is often called by anatomists at this day; and why it should be denominated the *silver cord*, no one need be told, that has seen its silvery whiteness, which is particularly remarkable as it appears in the living subject, or when exposed while death is recent and the body fresh.—The loosing of the silver cord is the final cessation of nervous influence and of all sensibility.—It is by means of the nerves that the soul transmits and effectuates its volitions. It is by them also that all the bodily senses convey to it the impressions made upon them by their respective objects. Is it, then, refining too much, to regard the nerves as the medium of communion between the body and the mind?—the bond, as it were, of their connection and intercourse?—and the loosing of the silver cord as the dissolution of their intimate and mysterious fellowship?

By the “golden bowl” some understand *the heart*. But to a bowl the heart bears no great resemblance, and still less to one of gold; and it is more probably represented, in next clause of the verse, by the *fountain*.—There are two membranes that envelope the brain; the one, firm and opaque,

surrounding the whole mass; yet, though in contact, not properly connected with it, but rather lining the skull;—the other, soft, delicate, and transparent, closely attached to the brain, insinuating itself between all its convolutions, compacting and lubricating the whole. The *golden bowl* might be the common anatomical name for this beautiful integument, both on account of its globular shape, and from its yellowish colour, bearing a nearer resemblance to that of gold than any other part of the body. There is no occasion, in this any more than in the former case, for having recourse to poetical imagery. There is in truth much more of fancy and metaphor in the designations of the *severe* and the *affectionate mother*,* given in modern anatomy to the two membranes I have mentioned, than in that of the golden bowl, which is founded surely in a greatly simpler and more direct resemblance.—I have somewhere seen it said, that this membrane is frequently shrivelled and ruptured at death. But whatever be in this, the breaking of the golden bowl may signify the termination of all the functions of that most essential and precious organ of the mind's operations, the brain.—“In that very day, his thoughts perish.”

The expressions which follow have been conceived to refer to the circulation of the blood:—“and the pitcher be broken at the fountain, and the wheel be broken at the cistern.”—The discovery

* Dura mater, and pia mater.

of this most wonderful and beautiful process being attributed to an anatomist of our own country, at a period comparatively very recent, it may be reckoned extravagant to suppose the knowledge of it to have been possessed by Solomon in so remote an age of antiquity. It is not at all impossible, however, that this knowledge might then have existed, and, like some other branches of science, have been subsequently lost; which does not in the least detract from the praise due to the modern discoverer. It seems exceedingly unlikely that the circulation of the blood should have been an entire secret till so late as the beginning of the seventeenth century. Passages have been quoted from different writers, which seem to prove, that it was not unknown to the ancients; whatever uses they made of their acquaintance with it, and in whatever ways they might account for its curious and astonishing phenomena. But, at any rate, let us recollect what the inspired record affirms of the extent of information, in the various departments of natural science, acquired by Solomon. It is true that we have no remains of his researches in human and comparative anatomy. But the same thing is true of other branches, in which we know him to have excelled. He “spoke of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall:”—yet where are now the traces of Solomon’s botany? . “He spoke also of beasts:”—what has become of his zoology?—“and of fowl,

and of creeping things, and of fishes:”—are any extant works, or remnants of works, to be found in the departments of natural history that treat of these?—Even the intimation, general as it is, that these different provinces of animated nature were extensively explored, and carefully studied by him, warrants the conclusion that he was not inattentive to their internal and comparative structure: and when we connect with this the penetrating sagacity and comprehensive enlargement of his mind, we may feel our incredulity mitigated at least, if not entirely removed, respecting his acquaintance with the sanguineous system.

The HEART is the FOUNTAIN, from which the streams of vital nourishment pervade the whole animal frame. To enter into any minute detail of the manner in which it performs its office, and of the entire system of venous and arterial vessels, would be utterly out of place. Some general idea, however, may be given of the process.—For the due performance of its functions, the human heart is divided into four distinct cavities or chambers. From one of these, on the left side of the heart, the blood, in its pure state, is forced, by the powerful contraction of this wonderful organ, (a contraction produced by the quantity and the stimulating virtue of the blood itself,) into the open mouth of one large artery, which immediately branches off in smaller divisions, and these again in smaller, till their numberless and unsearchably minute ramifica-

tions have diffused the streams of life, and warmth, and nourishment, to the remotest extremities of the body,—so perfectly, you are all aware, that you cannot pierce the skin with the point of a needle, without puncturing a vessel, and drawing blood. From the arteries, the blood is taken up by the mouths of innumerable small veins, which, reversing what took place with the arteries, unite into larger and larger branches, (like rills uniting into streamlets, and these into rivers,) till at length, by two large veins, one bringing it from the superior, and the other from the lower parts of the body, it is poured into the upper cavity, (where these two veins unite,) on the right side of the heart,—the side opposite to that from which it had issued.—But observe—the blood is not now in the same state. It issued of a bright red colour, and fit for the purposes of life. It is now of a dark purple hue, and, in its passage through the body, has either contracted or parted with such qualities, as to be no longer capable of supporting life,—of giving warmth and nourishment to the animal frame. It must be again purified. And wonderful is the provision made for this necessary purpose. From the upper cavity on the side of the heart to which the blood was restored by the veins, it passes into the inferior chamber on the same side: and thence it is propelled, through a large artery, to the lungs. Into the lungs we are continually, by respiration, drawing the air of the atmosphere. The vessels into which the air is

drawn, lie close along-side of the blood-vessels, throughout the entire substance of the lungs. The air which we inhale is found, when we breathe it out again, to have lost its purity, and to have become unfit for the support of animal life. That which it has lost has been imparted, by a mysterious chemical process, to the blood; which is sent back from the lungs, in its original purity, by several large veins, which unite at the upper cavity, or reservoir, on the left side of the heart. From this it passes into the inferior cavity, from which it had first issued, and commences anew its nutritious course through the system.—Thus, there are properly *two circulations*,—a greater and a lesser; one through the body, the other through the lungs; both equally essential, each being useless without the other; and both incessantly going on together:—two hearts, in truth, beating simultaneously, receiving the blood at the same instant, the one from the body and the other from the lungs, and then at the same instant driving it through the body and through the lungs again, and that at the rate of seventy strokes every minute, during the whole course of a man's life! The various arrangements, and exquisite contrivances, by which both these circulations are effected, so as to go forward continually, independently of our volitions, present a display of wisdom and power utterly overwhelming; such as no man can contemplate in a proper frame of mind, without adoring the Author of his

being, and exclaiming, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made:”—“O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.”

In the verse before us, then, we may suppose the heart to be the “fountain:”—the great artery, which receives the blood immediately from it, to be distributed through all the rest, may be intended by the “pitcher:”—and the “pitcher is broken at the fountain,” when, at death, this vessel loses its elastic propelling power, ceases to act, collapses, and lies empty and useless.

The *wheel* was a power by which the water was drawn from the *cistern*, or *pit*. It may be understood to represent the *lungs*, the organ of respiration. And this indeed seems to be the great impelling power of the whole living system; on which depend all the effective movements of the heart itself, and consequently of every other part of the animal frame. The play of the heart is maintained by the play of the lungs, by which its purity and its stimulant powers are imparted to the blood. So that, by an analogy, not indeed in all respects correct, but as well grounded as some more modern ones in anatomical science, the lungs may be said to bring its fluid contents from the heart, as the wheel draws the water from the well.—When death approaches, the lungs gradually cease to play; less and less air is inhaled, and inhaled with irregularity and difficulty; the action of the heart becomes proportionally feeble and

intermittent; till at length the last breath is faintly expired; the lungs collapse; the pulses all cease; and the stillness of death ensues.—And then—

Verse 7. “The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.”—The body, formed originally from the dust, shall undergo the full execution of its sentence,—“Dust thou (art), and unto dust thou shalt return;” a sentence pronounced on man, in consequence of his sin, and of which the stroke of death, throughout successive generations, has been the righteous fulfilment. For, although man was formed from the dust, he was not on that account necessarily mortal. The power that gave him life was able to sustain it in never-fading vigour. We talk of death as coming in the course of nature. But of the original course of nature, when man came, in the beauty of holiness, from his Creator’s hand, it was no part. It pertains to the course of *fallen* nature. Man was deathless while he was sinless. He became mortal when he apostatized from God. And the universality of the reign of death is a mournful but conclusive evidence of the universality of the apostasy. Every shrouded corpse, and every opening grave, should lead our minds back to the entrance of sin,—to

“—man’s first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our wo.”

And while the body is consigned to the grave, to be food for the loathsome worm, and to mingle with the dust of former generations, the immortal spirit, the tenant of this earthly tabernacle, shall—perish with it? No.—Sleep with it in the tomb for ages in a state of insensibility? No.—It shall “return unto God who gave it.”—Solomon was no materialist. He did not consider the soul as of the same substance with the body, and thought as the mere result of certain modifications and arrangements of matter and motion, and death the final destruction of the whole man;—but the body as only the organ of the indwelling spirit, like a complete set of admirably adapted instruments, by which it acquired its knowledge, and reduced that knowledge to use in the execution of the dictates of its will; and the soul, though acting by means of the body while it continues its occupant, yet capable of existence, of thought and of activity, in a state of separation from it. Of the manner, it is true, in which a spirit exists, and thinks, and acts, and enjoys, in its disembodied state, we can form no distinct conception; but we are quite as ignorant of the manner in which spirit operates on matter when connected with it; for, though we know the facts, we cannot account for them: and if even the facts that are attested by our senses and experience we are unable to explain, ought not this to prevent incredulity and scepticism, as to others that are beyond the sphere of our obser-

vation, and which we have no cause for doubting but our incapacity to conceive of them?

Nor was the soul, according to Solomon, to fall, during the sleep of the body in the grave, into a state of insensibility, or unconsciousness.—Had it been to partake in the deep slumbers of the tomb, it could not have been said to “return to God who gave it” any more than the body. The distinction between the two is marked; and the existence of the soul, in life and consciousness, when separate from the body, emphatically declared.

When the spirit thus returns to God, we are not to understand that in every instance it is to remain in his presence, and to enter into his joy. It goes to receive its doom from the supreme Judge; a doom, not at that time formally pronounced indeed, but which the subsequent decisions of the great day shall only recognize and ratify. That day of formal judicial sentence may be distant: but this is not inconsistent with immediate transition at death to happiness or wo,—with the “spirits of the just” being “made perfect” in heaven, and the souls of the wicked “going to their own place,” to that “everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels.”—“The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments.”

The feelings, my friends, with which we contemplate the description in this passage, or behold it

realized in our aged friends or others around us, must vary according to the characters and the prospects of those in whom we witness the symptoms of decay and of approaching dissolution.—“The hoary head is a crown of glory, when it is found in the way of righteousness.” There is not on earth a more venerable and delightful spectacle than that of an aged pilgrim “walking with God:” and a more affecting and deeply melancholy sight can hardly, on the contrary, be imagined, than that of a hoary-headed sinner, who has lived his fourscore years “without God in the world!”—all that time, God calling and he refusing;—and the Almighty “angry with him every day:”—his body now bowed down beneath the weight of years,—all his powers, of action and of enjoyment, decaying,—every hour likely to be his last,—time all behind him, and eternity all before him,—and his soul still “dead in trespasses and sins,”—the hour of his departure come, and no readiness for the world to which he is bound!—O with what opposite emotions do we contemplate old age in this character, and in the saint of God, who, in approaching the close of his earthly pilgrimage, is drawing near to what has long been the goal of his hopes and desires; who, while outwardly decaying, is inwardly maturing for heaven; in whom every symptom of coming death is but a symptom of approaching life; and who, in the final exhaustion of nature, bids adieu to the world in the words of aged Simeon,

“ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,—for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!”

True, indeed, it is painful for affection to mark the indications of increasing feebleness in the objects of its tender regard; to see infirmities multiplying, and troubles gaining ground, which it feels its inability to remove, and can only soothe by the gentle offices of kindness; to be thus continually reminded, that the hour is at hand when the dear old father, or friend, to whom it has long clung in fond attachment, must take his final leave. And when that hour arrives,—when the “ silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl broken, the pitcher broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern;” even though the event had long been anticipated, who can witness it without deep emotion?—who can part even from exhausted age without a pang of inexpressible tenderness?

Of all the periods and events of life, the concluding scene is the one of deepest interest to the person himself, and to surviving spectators. Various are the ways in which it comes, and various the aspects it presents; but in all it is solemn. What can be more so, than the approach of that moment, which, to the dying man, is the boundary between time and eternity! which concludes the one, and commences the other; which terminates all his interests in this world, and fixes his condition for a never-ending existence in the world unknown!—What can be more so, than those moments of

silent and indescribable anxiety, when the last sands of the numbered hour are running; when the beat of the heart has become too languid to be felt at the extremities of the frame; when the cold hand returns not the gentle pressure; when the restless limbs lie still and motionless; when the eye is fixed, and the ear turns no more toward the voice of consoling kindness; when the breath, before oppressive and laborious, becomes feebler and feebler, till it dies slowly away,—and to the listening ear there is no sound amidst the breathless silence, nor to the arrested eye, that watches with the unmoving look of thrilling solicitude for the last symptom of remaining life, is motion longer perceptible;—when surrounding friends continue to speak in whispers, and to step through the chamber on the tiptoe of cautious quietness, as if still fearful of disturbing him—whom the noise of a thousand thunders could not now startle,—who has fallen on that last sleep, from which nothing shall rouse but “the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God.”

Solemn and affecting as the scene is, when man thus “goeth to his long home,”—when age closes in death,—when “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it;” how sweetly cheering, how inexpressibly consoling is it, when the valley of the shadow of death is lighted from heaven; and when the grave, dark and dreary as it is, is closed over the dead, “in the sure and certain hope,” that as “Jesus died and rose again,

even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Ye aged pilgrims, who have begun to experience and to exemplify the truth of Solomon's description,—fear not. Let your trust be in Him who hath said, "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee:"—" (Even) to (your) old age I (am) he; and (even) to hoar hairs will I carry (you)." Look backward with gratitude, look upward with confidence, and look onward with hope. Your "heart and your flesh fail; (but) God (is) the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever."

And O ye who have lived from childhood to youth, and from youth to age, regardless of God and of eternity, with no relish for any pleasures but those of time and sense, "walking in the ways of your hearts, and in the sight of your eyes," and to whom the years have "drawn nigh," and have come, when the zest of those earlier pleasures is gone, and there is nothing in their stead,—to whom remembrance yields only regrets, and anticipation doubts and fears:—O end not as you have begun: die not as you have lived: you have thrown away your life; throw not away eternity too. Your guilt has been deep; your folly has been extreme; your danger is imminent; but I dare not say,—the mercy of God in the gospel forbids me to say,—that your condition is hopeless. Even to you, the sceptre of his grace is extended; even to you the voice of invitation is still addressed, "Turn ye,

turn ye, for why will ye die?" There is but a step between you and death. O let not that last step be taken without God. Bow before the footstool of his throne. Lay your gray hairs there in the dust of penitential abasement. Confess your guilt. Let your spirit bend to the offers of free mercy. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved:" for he excepts none from the gracious assurance, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

And ye, my young friends, which of the two characters we have been bringing before your view would you wish to be yours, should you live to old age? You can have but one answer to the question. You desire to die in peace with God, and in good hope for eternity. If such be your desire, "remember now your Creator in the days of your youth." Thus prepare for an honourable and happy old age, and for a death of tranquillity and hope.—But your reaching old age, the word of God tells you, and the events of every day tell you, is an extreme uncertainty. You have no covenant with death. The years you anticipate may never come; they may never even "draw nigh." "Childhood and youth are vanity." If, therefore, you would live a life of genuine happiness, however long,—“remember your Creator in the days of your youth:” and if you would be secure for a future world, at whatever period you may be summoned from this, again I say, “remember your

Creator in the days of your youth.”—I could call many amongst my hearers to witness to you, that they were strangers to true enjoyment till they entered on a religious life,—a life of faith upon the Son of God. “O taste, and see that the Lord is good.”

LECTURE XXIII.

ECCLES. xii. 8—14.

- 8 *“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher ; all (is) vanity.*
9 *And, moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still*
10 *taught the people knowledge ; yea, he gave good heed,*
11 *and sought out, (and) set in order many proverbs. The*
12 *Preacher sought to find out acceptable words : and (that*
13 *which was) written (was) upright, (even) words of truth.*
14 *The words of the wise (are) as goads, and as nails fas-*
15 *tened (by) the masters of assemblies, (which) are given*
16 *from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be*
17 *admonished : of making many books (there is) no end ;*
18 *and much study (is) a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear*
19 *the conclusion of the whole matter ; Fear God, and keep*
20 *his commandments : for this (is) the whole (duty) of man.*
21 *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every*
22 *secret thing, whether (it be) good, or whether (it be) evil.”*

“VANITY of vanities, saith the preacher ; all (is) vanity.”—With this general declaration, the book had commenced, as the text of the preacher’s discourse. This text he had illustrated in a great variety of lights, never losing sight of it, but frequently repeating it with particular application to

the different branches of his subject. He had commented on human life, in many of its diversified conditions and aspects, and had shown the vanity of it in each. He had at length, in the most affecting terms, described the wants, and frailties, and troubles, of its concluding period, and had brought it, after its longest continuance, to its universal termination:—"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

How appropriate, in this connection, is the repetition of his text! There is no season in which the vanity of life is more strikingly apparent, than when a man looks back upon it from its approaching close. O in what a different light does it appear to the recollections of dying age, and to the sanguine anticipations of vigorous and healthful youth! The latter looks forward to long life, and his flattering hopes fill the prospect with prosperity and happiness:—he "rejoices in his youth, and his heart cheers him in the days of his youth." To the former, the longest life appears, in the retrospect, as short, as, in the anticipations of his early days, it had seemed long: and, if he has continued to live for the present world only, his recollections of the past must be not only "vanity," but unutterable "vexation of spirit." The pleasures of sin, however fascinating in the enjoyment, will *then* be found to "bite like a serpent and sting like an adder:"—and all the fled joys of worldly prosperity—O how

inexpressibly vain the remembrance of them, when “the silver cord” is just giving way,—the dust about to “return to the earth,” and “the spirit to God who gave it!”—when the recollections of time are absorbed in the anticipations of eternity! The hand of death will lift from before the eyes of the dying the vail of delusive fascination that covered the emptiness of earthly joys; and this solemn truth, inscribed upon them all, will appear in its dread reality, and be felt in all its bitterness by the disappointed and foreboding heart—“Vanity of vanities,—all (is) vanity!”

The royal author of this book, we have had repeated occasion to observe, does not merely draw conclusions from reasonable principles and suppositions, but delivers the dictates of observation and experience. He had seen crowds of mortals flocking to various springs, in different and opposite directions, all in quest of the waters of happiness; and he formed the resolution, (certainly not in wisdom) of trying them all for himself. He records in this book the results of his trial; to assure mankind, that at no one of those fountains where happiness is usually sought is it really to be found, and to direct them, for the attainment and permanent possession of it, to the “river of God’s pleasures.”

The determination to warn others is, in the mind of a penitent, the natural suggestion of the experience he has had of the vanity and the bitterness of sin. The suggestion is especially strong, when a

professed servant of God has gone astray. He has "given occasion to the adversaries of the Lord to blaspheme." He knows and feels this; and he is anxious to counteract, by subsequent exertion for the spiritual benefit of others, the mischief he may have done by his wicked defection. Solomon had set a dreadful, and widely pernicious example before his subjects. He here appears in the character of a penitent, himself returning to God, and seeking to bring others along with him; employing all his wisdom for this purpose.

Verse 9. "And, moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, (and) set in order, many proverbs."

"The preacher was wise." To the origin of his unrivalled wisdom we have had frequent occasion to advert. Solomon had been thankful for this precious gift of God. But for a time, in the latter period of his life, he had most miserably abused it. The "light that was in him" had been "darkness;" his faculties having been perverted to the purposes of vice and folly. Now, when he is restored to the right way, his wisdom is applied anew to proper and worthy ends.—"When thou art restored," said our Lord to Peter, "strengthen thy brethren:"—"feed my sheep—feed my lambs."

The preacher "still taught the people knowledge;"—both by speech, and by writing. He taught them knowledge of the most useful and im-

portant kind,—spiritual, sanctifying, saving knowledge,—genuine, heaven-derived wisdom. The knowledge which Solomon possessed was very various. It embraced a wide circle of science and philosophy. But it was not this that he taught the people. It was the knowledge of true religion : and in this book we have a specimen of his instructions.

I cannot but remark here, how differently the relative value of things is estimated by men and by God. Many a philosopher and naturalist, I doubt not, has wished with all his heart that, instead of those writings of Solomon preserved in the bible, we had had some of his treatises on the natural history of plants and animals. But Divine wisdom has judged otherwise. It is not the intention of the scriptures to teach men earthly science, but to teach them religion ; not to make them philosophers, but to make them saints. In consistency with this design, those writings of Solomon which have come down to us as a part of the sacred canon, and which we hold to have been “given by inspiration of God,” are such as exhibit the nature of practical godliness, and the encouragements to its cultivation, and prescribe numerous and excellent rules for the conduct of life.

“Yea, he gave good heed :” that is, he applied himself to this object. He investigated truth carefully ; not uttering rash and hasty sayings, but the results of meditation, and prayer, and divine illumi-

nation.—He tried the various methods of instructing men, and amongst the rest that of *sententious maxims*, or *proverbs*. Of these, he “sought out and set in order many.”—The inspired historian of his reign says, “He spoke three thousand proverbs.”* By a proverb we usually understand a short pithy sentence, comprising in few words some important and notorious truth, and in current and general use. The latter part of this definition does not necessarily belong to the idea of a proverb, in the sense in which the term is used by Solomon. There is no reason whatever for believing that all his proverbs were in previous circulation, and were by him merely *collected*. With some of them this might be, and probably was, the case. But in general, they appear to have been the wise man’s observations on human life, and on the circumstances, characters, and prospects of men,—“sought out” with attentive care, committed to writing as they were made, and then “set in order,” or arranged, in as far as they were capable of arrangement, for public use. Those of them that are contained in the “Book of Proverbs” we consider as having the sanction and authority of the Spirit of God.—And a wonderful book it is. What an inexhaustible treasure of practical wisdom! The more deeply it is searched into, the more we shall always discover in it; and the more diligent and attentive our observation of human life, and of human nature,

* 1 Kings iv. 32.

both in ourselves and others, the more of truth and accuracy will there be found in its various and valuable sayings.

In teaching the people wisdom, “the preacher” (verse 10.) “sought to find out acceptable words; and (that which was) written (was) upright, (even) words of truth.”

“Acceptable words :”—literally, *words of delight*. —He threw his instructions into various forms, to attract and to fix the attention. He accommodated himself in this respect, as far as was consistent with preserving inviolate the interests of truth, to the diversified tastes of men. He took care to avoid every thing, in his modes of expression, and in the general manner of his instructions, that could tend unnecessarily to irritate, disgust, and repel, those whom it was the desire of his heart to make “wise unto salvation.” He sought to gain their ear, only that he might the more effectually reach their hearts. He used all the sweetness of persuasion, all the solemnity of affectionate warning, and all the faithfulness of kind reproof, to win sinners from the error of their ways, and draw them to God. The first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs, present us with a most interesting specimen of these “acceptable words.” There is in them an inimitable union of admonitory fidelity, and enticing and subduing kindness. Like Paul, he “exhorts, and comforts, and charges, as a father doth his children.” The whole soul of the writer

is breathed out in the earnestness of benevolent desire.

It is plain, that his “seeking to find out acceptable words” refers not to the *matter*, but to the *manner* of his teaching. In the matter, he could not accommodate himself to the likings of corrupt creatures, —creatures that are ever disposed to “say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things; speak unto us smooth things; prophecy deceits: get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us.”* The very reason why he was desirous to “find out acceptable words” was, that he knew the truth itself to be unpalatable. His object was, to win men to that which was fitted to secure their happiness, but to which they were naturally disinclined. In the doctrines and precepts delivered by him, he adhered most scrupulously to the counsel of God:—“and (that which was) written (was) upright, (even) words of truth.” In this he was unbending. What he spoke and what he wrote was “upright,” not only as being the genuine declaration of his own mind, but as according with Divine intimations, and with the dictates of that law, which is “holy, and just, and good,” —“righteous altogether:”—and it was “true,”—the unerring and unadulterated truth of God. He could say, in the language of the apostle of the Gentiles, “We are not, as many, who corrupt the

* Isa. xxx. 10, 11.

word of God:” “We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man’s conscience, in the sight of God.”*—Although Paul, lest his success among the Greeks should be imputed to his artificial eloquence, and not to the power of the truth and Spirit of God, avoided the studied arts of Grecian rhetoric,—the “enticing words of man’s wisdom;” yet doubtless he also, like Solomon, “sought to find out acceptable words,”—all the modes of earnest and faithful, but insinuating and winning, persuasion. He who “warned sinners, night and day, with tears,”—he who “prayed and besought men, in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled unto God,” would, without question, shun every thing, in speech and in manner, that could be needlessly irritating and repulsive.

The nature and design of the preacher’s instructions are stated in verse 11. “The words of the wise (are) as goads, and as nails fastened (by) the masters of assemblies, (which are) given from one shepherd.”

They are “as goads.” The meaning of this is sufficiently obvious. The goad was a staff with a sharp point of iron, used for stimulating oxen, and quickening their pace, when engaged in drawing the plough, or in other labour. Thus “the words of the wise” are intended to be excitements to the service

* 2 Cor. ii. 17. iv. 2.

of God ; to stir up to increased activity such as are already employed in it, and to rouse others from their thoughtless lethargy, to “prick them in their hearts,” to excite them to inquiry respecting their best interests, and to animate them to press, through all opposition and difficulty, into the ways of God.

The latter part of the verse is not so plain ; and various have been the proposed renderings and explanations of it.*—It may be observed, that the word “fastened” does not, in the original language, agree in gender with “nails,” but with “the *words* of the wise ;”† and the whole verse may perhaps be thus rendered :—“The words of the wise, (which are) as goads, and fastened deeply as nails (by) the masters of assemblies, are given from one shepherd.”

“The words of the wise” are the words of Solomon himself, and of those other “holy men of God,” who “spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”—We have seen why they are compared to goads. They are further said to be “fastened deeply as nails (by) the masters of assemblies.” They are explained to the understanding, applied to the conscience, driven home to the heart, and fixed in the memories, of their hearers, by the public teachers of the people.—There may, perhaps, be a special reference to such short comprehensive

* See Dathius, Van der Palm, and Hodgson, on the verse ; and Parkhurst's Lexicon, on the word שמר.

† Lowth.

sayings as the Proverbs, (verse 9.) which are fitted to make a deep and abiding impression on the mind, and to be easily kept in remembrance. Like nails, they are at once sharp, and take a firm hold.

And these words of the wise “are given from one shepherd.” Can there be any hesitation about the meaning of this? The “Shepherd of Israel, who guided Joseph like a flock,—he that dwelt between the cherubim,”—he is the original giver of all the words of inspired wisdom. The subordinate shepherds, the divinely commissioned teachers and guides, were many; but they received all their communications from him.—The designation is most frequently applied in the scriptures to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine Messiah.* And as He, the second Person of the blessed Trinity, is represented as having from the beginning had the immediate conduct of the whole scheme of redemption, it is likely that we should understand the words before us of HIM.—The prophets, who prophesied of the grace that was to come unto the church in the fulness of time, “inquired and investigated diligently,—searching what or what manner of time the SPIRIT OF CHRIST which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom,” says the apostle Peter, “it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto

* Compare Psal. xxiii. 1. Isa. xl. 10, 11. Ezek. xxxiv. 23.
John x. 11. Heb. xiii. 20. 1 Pet. v. 4.

us, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you WITH THE HOLY GHOST sent down from heaven." Thus the Spirit that spoke by the prophets and by the apostles is the same. The words of the wise are "the true sayings of God;" to be received by us as such, with humble reverence, lively gratitude, constant remembrance, and prompt and universal obedience.

Verse 12. "And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books (there is) no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

"My son:"—This is the same style of address with that used by Solomon in the book of Proverbs. He is not, I think, to be understood as directing his discourse expressly and exclusively to *Rehoboam*, but in general to *his reader*, whosoever he might be. It is the address of an old man, and the expression of an affectionate heart. Solomon uses it in the same spirit with the venerable apostle John, when he writes to the disciples of Christ, in his advanced age, as his little children:—"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not."

"*By these*, my son, be admonished." This may mean, either, by "the words of the wise" in general, mentioned in the eleventh verse, or more particularly, by the words of wisdom contained in the book which he was just bringing to a close.

In the latter view of the verse it may be thus paraphrased:—"Receive, my son, the admonitions

conveyed in this brief review of the vanity of life. ‘Of making many books (there is) no end, and much study (is) a weariness to the flesh.’ A vast deal more might be written. I might multiply treatises. The subject, in connection with others that are related to it, is inexhaustible. But ‘of making many books (there is) no end.’ I need not set myself to the endless task. By *these*, my son, be admonished. I have said enough for your conviction and warning. Receive the instruction, and be wise. I might write, till the study of what was written would be a weariness to the flesh. But there is no need. Let what I have written suffice.”

In the former view, thus:—“My son, I have written much, and I have studied more. Many a time have I worn out my bodily strength, in my researches into the works of nature and of art,—into all the subjects that occupy human investigation. Of such pursuits and labours I find there is no end: and however agreeable, and however profitable, they may in some respects be, and however worthy of a share of thy attention,—yet let me, above all things, direct you to ‘the words of the wise,’—to the writings of Moses and the prophets, to the ‘lively oracles’ given, through them, by the one Shepherd, the God of Israel. By *these*, my son, be admonished:—make *these* the men of thy counsel,—thine instructors, thy guides, thy reprovers, thy comforters. From other works you may receive entertainment, and, by hard and wear-

some study, extensive, and, it may be, useful information. But these alone can make you truly wise, wise from above, wise unto salvation:—‘The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes: the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb.’”*

He then proceeds to sum up the whole in a single weighty sentence, one of “the words of the wise:”—Verses 14, 15. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole (duty) of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether (it be) good, or whether (it be) evil.”

“Fear God, and keep his commandments.”—These words express a principle, along with the conduct which natively flows from it, and is the evidence of its existence. The *fear of God* comprehends in it all the gracious affections of the soul towards Him, which are produced by the Holy Spirit, and ought to be cherished under his supplicated influence;—holy awe of his infinite majesty,

* Psal. xix. 7—10.

his spotless purity, and inflexible justice,—fervent gratitude for his goodness and mercy,—confidence in his wisdom, power, and faithfulness,—implicit submission to his sovereign will,—and supreme delight in his entire character.—The fear of God is founded in the knowledge of what he has revealed himself to be; and it is not only inseparable from love, but invariably proportioned to it in degree. There may be *terror* where there is no love; nay, where there is deep-felt and inveterate hatred. But this is as different from the gracious fear of God, as the trembling of a slave who detests his master, but feels himself to be in his power and at his mercy, is different from the filial reverence of an affectionate and ingenuous child, who, in proportion as he loves his father, dreads incurring his displeasure, and is made unhappy by a single word or look of disapprobation. It is the thought of his parent's anger, not the pain of correction, that grieves the spirit of such a child; and the agony of that thought is exactly according to the intensity and tenderness of his affection.

The fear of God, accordingly, is, in scripture, generally put for the whole of true religion in the heart, and is, not unfrequently, inclusive also of its practical results in the life. Those who “fear God,” and those who have “no fear of God before their eyes,” are the two great descriptions of mankind. Wherever the fear of God exists in the heart, there will follow the keeping of his com-

mandments in the life; and it is from the latter that we are to judge of the former. God's name is not feared, when his commandments are not obeyed. Practice is the test of principle,—the only sure criterion of all profession. It is the two together that constitute true religion. The heart must be “right with God,” and the life must prove its rectitude. “The fear of the Lord, that (is) wisdom; and to depart from evil (is) understanding:”—“The fear of the Lord, (is) the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do (his commandments).”*

“This (is) the whole (duty) of man.”—The word *duty* is in this translation supplementary. The expression in the original,—“This is the whole of man,”—has not, that I am aware of, any parallels by which it might be illustrated. The supplement of the word (duty) destroys its evidently designed comprehensiveness. It is not only the whole duty, but the whole honour, and interest, and happiness of man. And as *happiness* is the chief subject of the treatise, it might perhaps be a more appropriate supplement than the other. It is true indeed, inferentially,—invariably true, that the *duty* of man is his *happiness*; that the latter is inseparably associated with the former. But may not this be the very sentiment which Solomon intended to convey? The duty is expressed, and the happiness inferred. He sums up duty, in its principle and practice, and

* Job xxviii. 28. Psal. cxi. 10.

declares the fulfilment of this summary to constitute the whole happiness of man. That which men, in ten thousand ways, seek in vain,—all their pursuits terminating in “vanity and vexation of spirit,”—this is the short and infallible way to find.—True religion,—the fear and service of God,—is the honour and the happiness of man in the present life; and what is infinitely more, it embraces his entire existence as an immortal being, and secures his honour and happiness for the life to come. The honour and the happiness of such a being can never be truly estimated without viewing him in his relation to eternity. A life of true religion is the only life that yields present enjoyment worthy of his spiritual and deathless nature; and it is the only life that can ever END WELL. “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for THIS IS ALL THAT CONCERNETH MAN,”—is a sentiment that will be seen and felt in all its truth and importance, in that solemn day, that shall wind up and close the eventful history of our world, and fix, by an irrevocable sentence, the eternal destiny of every child of Adam:—

Verse 14. “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether (it be) good, or whether (it be) evil.”

The *certainty* of this event is ascertained by all the evidence that establishes the Divine authority of the bible;—it is confirmed by the secret intimations of conscience; and by all the present

irregularities, otherwise so unaccountable, in the Divine administration towards the children of men. —The *solemnity* of the event is unspeakable:—the assembling of all the millions of mankind that shall ever have existed, from the beginning to the close of time, before the tribunal of the universal Sovereign!—when “the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.”*—“I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. And the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is (the book) of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”†

“Every work” and “every secret thing” shall then be “brought into judgment:”—all the doings of men, however private, however anxiously concealed from their fellow-creatures, performed in the dead of night, and far from any human eye;—and all their thoughts, and desires, and purposes, though studiously kept within their bosoms, and never whispered to human ear. Nothing shall escape detection and disclosure. The eye of omniscience having witnessed all, and the Mind that embraces present, past, and future, with equal mi-

* 2 Pet. iii. 10.

† Rev. xx. 11, 12.

nuteness and equal certainty, having retained all, the sentence pronounced on each individual will be founded in a complete and unerring knowledge of all that he has been, and of all that he has done. This is probably all that is meant by God's "bringing every work into judgment." There will be such a development of character, as shall justify the supreme Judge, and the judgments he pronounces and executes, in the consciences of the condemned, and certify his unimpeachable righteousness to angels and men: but there seems no necessity for supposing a public discovery of every deed, and word, and thought, of every individual of the myriads before the judgment-seat.

The scriptures assure us, that the Lord Jesus Christ is to occupy, on that day, the throne of universal judgment;—"the throne of his glory:"* and the language of the prophet, in prospect of the first coming of the Son of God, may, in all its emphasis, be applied to his second:—"But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?"—What answer shall we give to this solemn inquiry? Shall none stand?—Yes: there shall "stand before the throne and before the Lamb a multitude which no one can number, out of all kindreds, and peoples, and nations, and tongues, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and shall sing with a loud voice, Sal-

* See John v. 22—27. Acts xvii. 30, 31. x. 42. Matt. xxv. 31—46.
2 Cor. v. 10, &c.

vation unto our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!" And this multitude shall consist of those who had sustained while on earth a certain character. That character is now before us. They shall all be such as "feared God and kept his commandments." "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous: for the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

It is necessary, however, to remind you, that the true fear of God, and the obedience thence resulting, must be founded in the faith of that testimony concerning himself which he has given us in his word. Nothing can be more manifest, than that, if God has revealed himself to sinners, and calls upon them to fear him, he means that he should be feared in the character in which he is revealed. The man who, with that revelation in his hand, professes to fear and to obey God on other terms than those which it prescribes, instead of honouring, insults him,—instead of offering an acceptable service, presents what he must reject with indignation. When God makes himself known to sinners, he makes himself known in a character corresponding to their condition. It is to men *as sinners* that the bible is addressed. If they do not read it in the remembrance of this, they cannot understand it; for the meaning and appropriateness of any communication must depend on the character, and

circumstances, and consequent needs, of those to whom it is made. As sinners, men need salvation. In the bible, accordingly, God appears as “the God of salvation;” and to “show unto men the way of salvation,” is its principal,—nay, I might almost say, taking salvation in the most enlarged sense of the term, its exclusive design.—It follows, that no sinner can be considered as truly fearing God, till he has recognized him in this relation, and distinctly and fully acquiesced in that way of salvation, or those proposals of mercy, which he has been graciously pleased to reveal. The first expression of genuine fear of God, on the part of a fallen creature, is the prayer of the publican, uttered in the publican’s frame of spirit, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”—A self-righteous sinner is the strangest, the most anomalous, and self-contradictory of all characters. That sinner shows that he has no right conceptions, no becoming impressions, of the purity and justice of his offended Maker,—that there is “no true fear of God before his eyes,”—who presumes to think that he can justify himself in his presence. Before man had sinned, it was the law, or authoritative appointment, of God, that he should hold his life of original blessedness on the condition of his continued innocence. But the moment man fell, and became a sinner, his case was necessarily altered; and it is now equally the law, or authoritative appointment, of God, that, as a sinner, he

must owe his forgiveness and happiness to sovereign grace and mercy, through faith in a Mediator. The reception given to the offers of a free salvation is now the test of loyalty or rebellion. That man retains in his bosom the spirit of a rebel, who persists in attempting what God has declared impossible, and in flattering himself he can want what God has pronounced indispensable; who flies in the face of his most explicit assurances, that “by the works of the law no flesh living shall be justified,” and still “goes about to establish his own righteousness;” who puts in his claim for right, when he should present his petition for favour; who, openly or secretly, in words or in heart, inserts his own name into that plea, from which the most High has excluded every name in or under heaven, but the name of his Son; who professes to seek the favour of God by “keeping his commandments,” and forgets that “this is his commandment,”—and, to a sinful creature, necessarily the first of all his commandments,—“that he believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.”

No true obedience, besides, can be rendered to the Divine commandments, so long as the heart continues estranged from God, and in its natural state of enmity against him:—and this enmity is slain only by the cross. The fear and the love of God take possession of the sinner’s heart together, when, feeling his sinfulness and condemnation, he flees thither for safety, beholds there “mercy and

truth meeting together, righteousness and peace embracing each other," justice and grace revealed with equal honour in the sufferings of the appointed Surety, "good-will to men" in union with "glory to God." The believing contemplation of these Divine harmonies at once penetrates with awe and melts with love:—and the sinner, relieved from slavish terror, and renewed in the spirit of his mind, "runs in the way of God's commandments." Fear restrains him from evil, and love incites him to good.

Allow me, then, in improving our exposition of these verses, *in the first place*, most earnestly to entreat you all, to give attention to "the words of the wise."—The holy scriptures are the records of Divine wisdom. They are very various; and they are all profitable. No knowledge, no wisdom, can be compared with that which they reveal. The treasures of the mind of Deity are laid open here. Things are made known which "eye had not seen, nor ear heard, and which it had not entered into the heart of man to conceive." Here, and here alone, are "the words of eternal life."—It is not to the philosophers of this world that your attention is now invited. Their researches in the various sciences, the sciences both of matter and of mind, we wish not to undervalue. In their subjects, these sciences are rational and dignified; in their discoveries, speculations, and reasonings, they are often interesting, elegant, and instructive; and in

many of their results, in their application to the purposes of human life, they are, in no small degree, useful. But, in religion and morals, the only safe instructors are those who received their lessons from God himself. All others are "blind guides," who, "professing themselves to be wise, have become fools."—"Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world, by wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we," (says one of those whom God commissioned to "destroy the wisdom of the wise, and to bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent,")—"we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness, but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."* The gospel of Christ is, with peculiar emphasis, denominated "the wisdom of God," being the most astonishing, and to us the most deeply interesting, of all the exertions and discoveries of Divine intelligence. The mechanical skill, displayed in the works of nature, marvellous as it is, must yield in excellence

* 1 Cor. i. 20—25.

to what may be termed the moral wisdom of the scheme of grace. The goodness visible in creation is transcendently surpassed by the mercy manifested in redemption. It is the knowledge of *this* discovery of God, that constitutes the most valuable wisdom. An acquaintance with all his other works, throughout the entire range of nature, supposing it attainable, could not countervail the ignorance of this. It would raise its possessor, indeed, to an elevation incomparably higher amongst his fellow-men; it would place his name first in the lists of scientific eminence, and transmit it for the wonder and applause of future generations. But it would not procure him, what the wisest as well as the weakest requires, the pardoning mercy of God, and eternal life. There is only one description of knowledge with which these are associated, and the weakest possessor of that knowledge is wiser than the wisest who is without it. Despised by men, it is highly esteemed with God. Excluded from human philosophy, and the possession of it, so far from being reckoned amongst the requisites of a man of science, exposing him to derision, rather than procuring him honour; it is the philosophy of the bible; it is the philosophy of heaven:—"These things the angels desire to look into."—O despise not, then, those "words of the wise," which declare the "faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world, to save sinners." Despise not the words of this heavenly

teacher himself, who is the Wisdom and the Word of God, on whom the Spirit was poured without measure, and who "spoke as never man spoke." Let his sayings sink deep into your ears. Receive them with meekness, and retain them with faith and love. Keep them, for they are your life.—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and (he) to whomsoever the Son will reveal (him). Come unto me, all (ye) that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke (is) easy and my burden is light." "My

sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave (them) me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck (them) out of my Father's hand. I and (my). Father are one." "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die."—O that these words of "a greater than Solomon," may be esteemed by you, as they truly are, words of wisdom, and not contemned as foolishness! May they be "as goads," "pricking you in your hearts," piercing your consciences with a sense of sin and danger, and urging you forward to the only Saviour! May the great "Master of assemblies" himself "fasten them as nails,"—giving them a deep, an abiding, a salutary and saving impression in every heart!

Secondly. Ye who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," who have felt the value of the word of God, and have learned to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge" which it contains,—who have known in your experience that to "fear God and keep his commandments" is the whole happiness of man, and are satisfied that it is his highest honour,—be encouraged to persevere unto the end.—Prize more and more highly "the words of the wise." "Search the scriptures." Believe the truths; rejoice in the pro-

mises ; practise the precepts, of this blessed book. “ Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Keep in your view the solemnities of a coming judgment : and whilst your hopes of acceptance at that day are founded exclusively in “ grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord,” forget not the obligations under which you lie to “ glorify God in your bodies and in your spirits, which are his.” Remember, the Master whom you serve has said to you, respecting whatever talents he has intrusted to your management, “ Occupy till I come.” Use them not, then, for sinful or selfish ends ; wrap them not in a napkin ; but employ them with diligence for the honour of his name and the interest of his cause ; that when he comes to take account of your stewardship, he may own you with his approving sentence, “ Well done, good and faithful servant ;—enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

Let not the vanities of the world seduce you from the possession and the pursuit of better and more enduring joys. Let the lesson that “ all is vanity,” be imprinted on your minds, as a truth affirmed by God, and attested by the unvarying experience of men. Let nothing tempt you to repeat Solomon’s unwise experiment ; but rest satisfied, and act upon the assurance, that the result would be to you the same as it was to him. “ Cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart.” Let HIM be, to

the end, “the portion of your inheritance and of your cup.” Still “fear God, and keep his commandments;” and you will increasingly experience while here, and fully know hereafter, that “this is the whole” happiness, and honour, and interest, “of man,” for time, and for eternity.

Lastly. It ought to be *our* desire and aim who profess to be servants of God in the ministry of the word, to make that word the exclusive standard of all our instructions, and to present and recommend these instructions with the same end in view, as to our hearers, with that for which they are given to us of God.—It is our duty to “speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” with a single eye to the glory of God and the best interests of men.—“To the law, and to the testimony: if we speak not according to this word, there is no light in us;”—and if we declare the truths of this word for selfish and unworthy purposes, the blessed Author of it may give these truths efficacy for the salvation of others, but our service he will disown:—he may save the hearer, but he will reject the preacher.

I have endeavoured to set before you, and to press upon your serious attention, the doctrine taught, and the conduct recommended and enjoined, in this interesting portion of the sacred volume, I hope with a sincere desire to promote the honour of my Master, and the present and future benefit of my hearers. But whatever may

have been the motives and aims of the preacher, of one thing be ye confidently assured, that in all that he has revealed,—in every doctrine, every precept, every promise, every warning, every threatening, the Divine Author of the bible has your good invariably in view. By what else, indeed, could he be influenced?—To his *doctrines* does he not graciously subjoin, Believe, and live?—Where amongst his *precepts* is the one that is not fitted to promote the well-being of him that keeps it?—His *promises*!—are they not “exceeding great and precious?”—What is the sum of all his *warnings*, but Do thyself no harm?—And even his *threatenings*,—the most tremendous declarations of the coming wrath,—are they not the utterance of mercy?—of that mercy that is “not willing that any should perish,” and that “has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth?”—What is the language of every one of them, coming from the very heart of that infinite Being who “delighteth in mercy?”—Is it not, “Escape for thy life!” “Flee from the wrath to come!” “Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?”

Are not the two great lessons of that book of which we are now closing our review, lessons dictated by the love of a benevolent God? Why does he record in his word, and urge upon your attention, the assurance that “all is vanity,” but to keep you from deceiving yourselves, where deception would be your ruin?—Why does he exhibit

the emptiness of the shadow, but to induce you to lay hold on the substance?—Why does he warn you away from the “streams of false delight,” but to conduct you to the fountain of unmingled and eternal joy?—Be assured, every one of you, that all the contents of his word are in harmony with the kindness of his heart :—that he makes nothing your duty which you will not find to be at the same time your interest :—and under this conviction, hear again “the conclusion of the whole matter,” the comprehensive summary of these “words of the wise” to which we have been attending,—the aim of the writer from the beginning to the close of his treatise,—the end to which he meant all his details to lead,—the grand lesson which the whole were intended to teach and to impress ; may it be graven in indelible characters on all your hearts, and may the God by whose authority it comes, give you to enjoy the full experience of its truth ! —“FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS ; FOR THIS IS ALL THAT CONCERNETH MAN !”

END OF THE LECTURES.

SERMON,

ON OCCASION OF THE DEATH

OF

WILLIAM WARDLAW, Esq.

SERMON,*

PREACHED ON OCCASION OF THE AUTHOR'S FATHER,
WILLIAM WARDLAW, ESQ., WHO WAS REMOVED FROM
THIS WORLD TO THE WORLD OF SPIRITS, ON THE MORN-
ING OF THE LORD'S DAY, MAY 20TH, 1821, IN THE
80TH YEAR OF HIS AGE.

GEN. xlix. 29—31.

29 “ *And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be
gathered unto my people : bury me with my fathers, in
30 the cave that (is) in the field of Ephron the Hittite ; In
the cave that (is) in the field of Machpelah, which (is)
before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham
bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite, for a posses-
31 sion of a burying-place. There they buried Abraham
and Sarah his wife ; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah
his wife ; and there I buried Leah.”*

IT is but a few weeks, my brethren, since, in addressing consolation to mourners in our assembly, I had occasion to observe, that such subjects were never unseasonable to any ; because none of us, in the midst of the most complete enjoyment, could possibly tell how soon the same comforts might be needed by ourselves. I did not then anticipate,

* See Preface, page viii.

that myself and my kindred were to afford, as we do this day, appearing amongst you in the garb of sorrow, an exemplification of the truth of the remark. And I cannot be sure, but that, in following the current of my own feelings, whilst I am soothing the spirit of my weeping friends, I may be also preparing some others for the arrival of similar afflictions.—May the Spirit of God,—the Spirit of power and of peace,—be with us, whilst we meditate on the interesting views that are suggested by the text !

The name of *Jacob* is one of three, on which the highest honour has been conferred that could be bestowed on the names of mortal men ;—that of being associated with the name of Jehovah, in a designation, chosen by himself, and to be transmitted to the close of time,—“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob : —this is my name for ever : and this is my memorial unto all generations.”*—The covenant made with Abraham, four hundred and thirty years before the law, being the covenant of grace, the designation is one of much the same import with the “God of salvation,” or the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And he is the God of all who are of the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; their faith having been the faith of the gospel, then revealed in promise, as it is now in testimony.

The text presents to our view one of these

* Exod. iii. 6, 15.

venerable patriarchs approaching the close of his earthly pilgrimage. "The time was come, that Israel must die."

* Of all the periods and events of life, the concluding scene is accompanied with the deepest interest both to the person himself and to surviving spectators. Various are the ways in which it comes, and various the aspects it presents; but in all it is affecting and solemn. What can be more so, than the approach of that moment which, to the dying man, is the boundary between time and eternity; terminating the one and commencing the other? putting an end to all his interests in this world, and fixing his condition for a never-ending existence, in the world unknown!—What can be more so, than those moments of silent and indescribable anxiety, when the last sands of the numbered hour are running; when the beat of the heart has become too languid to be felt at the extremities of the frame; when the cold hand returns not the gentle pressure; when the eye is fixed, and the ear turns no more towards the voice of consoling kindness; when the restless limbs are still and motionless; when the breath, before oppressive and laborious, becomes feebler and feebler, till it dies away, and to the listening ear there is

* The following paragraph has already formed a part of Lecture XXII. page 296. It was inserted there, when there was no thought of publishing this Sermon, to which it originally belonged. It is here repeated for the sake of connection.

no sound amidst the breathless silence, nor to the arrested eye, that watches with the unmoving look of thrilling solicitude for the last symptom of remaining life, is motion longer perceptible ; when surrounding friends continue to speak in whispers, and to step through the chamber on the tiptoe of cautious quietness, as if still fearful of disturbing him, whom the noise of a thousand thunders could not startle.

Have you witnessed such a scene, my friends ? If you have not, you have yet to experience the most deeply solemn feelings of which the bosom of man is susceptible. And they are feelings, rendered the more solemn by the thought, that what we now witness in another shall very soon be witnessed by others in ourselves. The scenes of another man's life may be such as can hardly be expected ever to occur to *us* ; but the dying scene is one which must come to all. There is no passage to another world, but through the valley of the shadow of death. By that way all must go, whether it conduct them to the abodes of bliss or to those of misery. This gives us an interest in the death of every one that dies. We then behold what, in one form or another, must inevitably befall ourselves.

When the king of Egypt, interested by the venerable appearance of the aged stranger, asked Jacob the natural and simple question, " How old art thou ? " the reply of the patriarch was that of

one who, having embraced the promises, “confessed himself a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth:”—“The days of the years of my pilgrimage (are) a hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.”*

These years of pilgrimage, to which seventeen more were yet to be added, had been very interesting and eventful. The patriarch had experienced, in no common degree, the vicissitudes of the world. He had tasted, and had even drunk largely, both of its bitter and its sweet. His old age had been tried with peculiarly severe afflictions; but it had also been cheered by peculiarly exquisite joys. He had wept tears of anguish over his beloved Rachel; he had afterwards mourned for Joseph, and refused to be comforted, saying, “I will go down unto the grave to my son mourning;” he had feared for Simeon; he had trembled for Benjamin; he had said, in the disquietude of his soul, “All these things are against me.”—But he had lived to find himself mistaken: he had lived to see not only Joseph, whom for twenty years he had given up as lost, but the children of Joseph: “I had not thought,” said he, “to see thy face; and lo, God hath showed me also thy seed.” Thus “at evening time there was light.”—He was now sensible of his approaching end. He had called

* Gen. xlvii. 8, 9.

his sons around him. Under the power of a prophetic spirit, he had pronounced the blessing of each, according to the future condition of their respective tribes: and, ere he “gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost,” he charged his sons in the words which form our text.

We shall consider them as the language—

I. Of RESIGNED AND TRANQUIL COMPOSURE.

II. Of NATURAL AFFECTION.

III. Of FAITH AND HOPE.

I. They are the words of *resigned and tranquil composure*.—The prospect of death is an awful and alarming one:—alarming to *nature*, which startles and shrinks from dissolution, and from the mysterious and unknown sensations which must accompany it; sensations which none who have experienced them have returned to describe:—alarming to *conscience*, which, sensible of guilt, is appalled by the assurance that “after death is the judgment.”

But in the text, there is no overwhelming agitation, no startling and shrinking timidity; but the calm and steady contemplation of the coming event, indicated by the perfect collectedness and the detailed particularity of the patriarch’s instructions respecting the place of his burial.

Far be it from me to flatter you with the assurance, that in every case composure like this is a certain indication that all is well. So we are very

apt to interpret it. But there have not been wanting instances, in which there has been too convincing evidence of the falsehood of the inference. —The “heart is deceitful above all things;” and the heart that has deceived a man through life may deceive him also in death. The man who has long and systematically cherished low thoughts of the purity and the justice of God; who, instead of bringing himself to the test of his spiritual and perfect law, has forgotten the first of all its demands, the love of God with all the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and has estimated his morality from his relation to fellow-creatures only; who has measured himself by the characters of others; by the laws of men, and the standard of virtue in a fallen world;—may continue to do the same even to the end: and, to the eye that has no spiritual discernment, the very ignorance of God may impart a composure that may pass for a well-grounded peace;—a composure, which a right apprehension of the holiness and justice of offended Deity would instantly turn into the tremblings of despair.

But such was not the composure of the dying patriarch. Jacob had been a *pilgrim* in this world. He had walked with God, as in a strange land, travelling homewards, to the heavenly country. Though *in* the world, he was not *of* the world. God was his friend, and heaven his home. It was not the composure of ignorance, but, as we shall

afterwards more fully see, of knowledge and of faith. "Mark the perfect (man), and behold the upright: for the end of (that) man (is) peace."* The dying patriarch resigns himself to God; and anticipates and meets his departure with the most dignified tranquillity, and without a disquieting apprehension. "I have waited for thy salvation, O God." This had been the exercise of his life; and this was his hope in death. Neither the unknown feelings of dissolution, nor the dreary darkness, and solitude, and revolting corruption of the grave, nor the leaving behind him of the comforts of life, and the endearments of domestic society, which had been so wonderfully restored and enlarged to him;—no—nor the prospect of appearing, in his unclothed spirit, before the vision of the most High and the most Holy, shook his serene and steadfast soul.

II. The words of the text are the language of *natural affection*.

The circumstances which he here mentions,—
 "There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah,"—could not be intended to assist his sons in ascertaining the spot. *That* there could be no difficulty in finding. It is the language of fond recollection, by which, whilst he revived in his own bosom the tenderness of former love, he reminded his sons, that, when they should lay

* Psal. xxxvii. 37.

him there, they should remember, with becoming affection and veneration, the precious deposits that had been committed to that tomb before him ; that they should drop a tear not for their father only, but for their long-departed mother, and for his aged, and loved, and revered, progenitors.—These had been the objects of endeared affection in life ; and, although death had removed them from the world, and from sight and social intercourse, it had left the feelings of nature in all their tenderness. Connubial and filial love expire not when the objects of them die. Death bursts indeed the bond that formed the living connection. But, while he mournfully succeeds in this, he is unable to sever those ties which memory still continues to twine around the heart. Those ties, on the contrary, are rather drawn the closer : they are softened, and they are strengthened. The dead become dearer to us than the living. Their ashes are hallowed. Their graves are an inviolable sanctuary. There is a tenderness, and a sacredness, and a sweet solemnity imparted to all the feelings ; and whatever touches their memory “ touches the apple of our eye,” even with acuter sensibility than what affected their living reputation.

Jacob was attached to the departed spirits of the pious dead, though he could not see them, nor hold converse with them in the language of earth ; and he was attached to their dust,—the dust that had once been animated by these “ spirits of the

just made perfect ;” and he was attached by all the melting power of living associations, to the spot where that dust was laid : “ There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife ; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife ; and there I buried Leah.”

We are quite unable, my friends, to form to ourselves the idea of a state of *insensibility*. The very conception we attempt to form of the absence of consciousness, is the conception of a something of which we still imagine ourselves to continue sensible.—When we think of being laid in the grave, it is with the impression, (which we are thus unable to dismiss from our minds,) of remaining consciousness. We cannot but fancy ourselves to be sensible of the darkness, the solitude, the confinement, the cold, and the corruption of the tomb.—On the same kind of principle, (only that whilst, in the former case, the illusion is painful, in this it engenders a sweetly pleasing and tender melancholy,) we imagine ourselves to continue sensible to the delight of being near those friends who in life were so dear to us. Our judgments, it is true, are satisfied that the dust of the tomb is as devoid of sensibility as the earth in which it has been deposited : but, try as we may, we cannot entirely divest ourselves of the conception of remaining consciousness.

The wish to be laid, in death, beside those whom we loved in life, is the dictate of nature :—it is, as far as we know, universal : there is no reasoning us out of it. We may speculate, and argue, and con-

vince ourselves and one another, that it will be all one in the end. But still, nature pleads, and *will* be heard. It is a cause, in which *feeling* carries it against all argument. And why not? Be it so, that it is an illusion: it is a pleasing one, and it is at least harmless.—Perhaps, indeed, we might take higher ground, than the ground of harmless illusion. We shall live in our separate spirits;—live, not merely in conscious existence, but in the full, and free, and perfect exercise of all our spiritual faculties. And shall our separate spirits be altogether unconcerned about those bodies of which they were before the living and the animating tenants? I see no reason to suppose it. The state of the departed child of God is still a state of *hope*. The spirits of the just are still “looking for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of their bodies.” And the living and intelligent soul may know the spot that contains the dust of its earthly tabernacle, and still please itself (if indeed you do not think such pleasure too infantile for heaven) with its proximity to the dust of Christian kindred, that were loved and honoured on earth, and whose spirits form part of the society of heaven.—At any rate, the appellation given by Nehemiah to his native country, to which he was longing to return, was one suggested by the finest feelings of his heart, “THE PLACE OF MY FATHERS’ SEPULCHRES:”—and the language of Ruth to Naomi is, in every expression it contains, the utterance of genuine affection:—“Entreat me not to leave thee,

(or) to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people (shall be) my people, and thy God my God : where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, (if ought) but death part thee and me.”*

And whilst such feelings are natural as to the place where, when we come to die, we should wish to be ourselves, they are no less so, when we are called to commit to the silent grave the bodies of our departed Christian relatives.—We long for the return of our friends when, during life, they go away from us to a distant place of sojourning :—and when, by the disposal of providence, their bones are left in a land of strangers, far from “ their fathers’ sepulchres,” we still feel as if they were not at home. We love to have them near us, even in death. We delight also in the thought of their mixing with *kindred dust*, of their resting together in the bed of their last sleep. It takes off from the grave the association of loneliness, and renders the impression on the fancy less dreary and forbidding.

But I must not anticipate what remains to be said on the *third* view of the patriarch’s dying charge :—

III. It is the language of *faith and hope*. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were “ heirs of the same promise.” It had been made successively to each of

* Ruth i. 16, 17.

them. To Jacob it had been several times repeated, and on occasions peculiarly interesting.*

When the patriarch came down into Egypt, he did not lose sight of the promise of God's covenant. It was not a final relinquishment of the promised land. He was himself indeed to die in Egypt; but he was desirous, and by the charge in the text he intimated the desire to his sons, that even in death he should be a possessor of that land; thus testifying his own faith, and establishing theirs.—He appears to have been particularly solicitous that this charge should not be neglected: he repeatedly enjoins it, and even binds it with an oath. On a previous occasion, but in prospect too of the close of life, the history informs us, “He called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: but I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying-place. And he said, I will do as thou hast said. And he said, Swear unto me. And he sware unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.”† And at a still later time—“Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die; but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers.”‡ Joseph himself afterwards, when the time of *his* departure drew near,

* See Gen. xxviii. 10—15. xxxv. 9—13.

† Gen. xlvii. 29—31.

‡ Gen. xlviii. 21.

expressed his faith in the same way with his venerable father : “ Joseph said unto his brethren, I die : and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land into the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.”*

When Jacob, in the text, commands that he should be laid with his fathers, he intimates his determination to have his part with them ;—not with the Egyptians, notwithstanding the kindness he had experienced at their hands, but with those chosen, tried, and faithful friends of God, who, “ through faith and patience,” had gone to “ inherit,” in the fulness of their spiritual meaning, “ the promises ” which had been equally made to them and to himself.

My brethren, could we be set down by “ the cave that was in the field of Ephron the Hittite ;”—did we know with certainty that we stood beside the sepulchre of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—of those justly venerated progenitors of the church of God ;—whilst we reject with loathing the absurdities of hallowed and wonder-working relics, yet could we, think you, be so insensible to the influence of all those sacred recollections that would crowd into our minds, as to feel no rising emotions of piety, no clinging attachment to the spot of earth that received in old time the mortal

* Gen. i. 24, 25.

remains of so much worth?—the tomb of the father of the faithful, and “the friend” of God;—the tomb of that son, that only son, Isaac, whom he loved,—that child of promise, with whom the covenant was confirmed—that man of piety and prayer, who “went out at eventide to his devotional meditations;”—and the tomb of him whose name was called *Israel*, because “as a prince he had power, with God, and prevailed?”

Well, my brethren, we are heirs with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of a better promise than that of Canaan; even of that heavenly country of which the earthly was a type,—and a type understood by those to whom the promise of it was made: “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as (in) a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker (is) God?” “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of (them), and embraced (them), and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that (country) from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to

have returned : but now they desire a better (country), that is, a heavenly : wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God ; for he hath prepared for them a city.”* This then was what supported and cheered their minds ; and not the mere hope of an earthly inheritance to be possessed, when they were gone, by their posterity. No.—Jacob could say with Job, in the assurance of rising to immortal life with these loved and venerated friends—“ For I know (that) my Redeemer liveth, and (that) he shall stand at the latter (day) upon the earth : and (though) after my skin (worms) destroy this (body), yet in my flesh shall I see God : whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another ; (though) my reins be consumed within me.”†

The same desire, when felt by us, of lying beside our Christian friends in the narrow house, ought to be the dictate and the expression of the same faith. Where, O where would be the pleasure of the thought, if the time were never to come

“ When op’ning graves shall yield their charge,
And dust to life awake ? ”

But for this, the thought would be destitute of all its interest ; nay, would be intolerably comfortless and dreary :—were the sleeping dust to sleep *for ever* ! It is the hope of rising together on the morning of that day of final jubilee, that shall be ushered in by the sounding of the trump of God—that

* Heb. xi. 3—10, 13—16.

† Job xix. 25—27.

“blessed day, that knows no morrow!” when “this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, and the saying shall be brought to pass that is written, Death (is) swallowed up in victory.”

How full of transport the assurance of thus meeting to part no more! of sitting down together with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven! We know where their departed spirits are, and the spirits of all who have fallen asleep in Jesus. Their bodies are scattered, in all quarters of the earth and sea; but all their souls are together in heaven; and additions are daily making to the number. The celestial abodes have been progressively peopling, ever since they received the solitary spirit of the murdered Abel; the first of men that died on earth, and the first that lived in heaven; and at last there shall be “a multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues.”

O how important is it, my brethren, that earthly relations should be *one in Christ*! Then they can “lie down together in the dust” in the blessed prospect of rising at the great day with the joy of mutual recognition. O the unutterable difference between *meeting at that day never to part*, and *parting never to meet*!

Think not that I have chosen this text, with the view of drawing any parallel between the life and character of Jacob and that of the loved and revered

relative and friend, fellow-christian and fellow-citizen, whose departure we this day mourn.—I have chosen it, because I knew the reflections suggested by it to be in harmony with *his* most fondly cherished feelings; and because they afford a soothing solace to those spirits which the Lord, by his bereaving hand, has wounded.—Yet are there some points of coincidence, on which filial affection may be allowed, for a little, to dwell.

Like Jacob, the child of godly parents, he “feared the Lord from his youth;” being indebted to them, as instruments, for his spiritual as well as his natural life.—His earthly pilgrimage, like Jacob’s, was long:—like his too (and in this indeed there is in neither case any peculiarity) it was a chequered scene of light and shade, of sunshine and storm;—and like his, it closed in peace: the sun of both went down in all the serenity of faith and hope.—“By faith” Jacob, like the other “Elders,” “obtained a good report:”—and I trust I may say, without exposing myself to the charge of undue partiality, that a better report has not often been obtained, than that which was enjoyed, and has been left behind, by him who has so recently finished his course amongst us. Seldom has a Christian quitted the world with a reputation more unblemished, with a character more unsullied by the breath of slander.

My brethren, I feel, that in speaking of a departed father, a son who loved and revered him is on delicate ground. Yet I feel also, that my heart

must have utterance. Lying under obligations to *him*, which never have been, and never can be, repaid, I *must* speak of him. You would accuse me of want of sensibility if I did not ; and I appeal for my vindication to the paternal and filial sympathies of your own bosoms.

The good report which he possessed, and which attaches to his memory, was, like that of the worthies of older times, obtained *by faith*. Yes, my friends, this was the avowed principle, this the living and animating soul, of his whole character. He could say with Paul, “ the life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”* The enlightened, and fervent, and elevated piety, which delighted so much in the devotional exercises of the closet, the family, and the sanctuary, and in secret meditation on that blessed word, which had been the constant study of his earlier and his later days, with which his memory was richly stored, and which afforded him a source of the sweetest pleasure, when it had pleased God to deprive him of the blessing of sight, and greatly to impair that of hearing ; that piety which infused its sacred influence into his entire deportment, was piety springing from the firm faith of “ the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” When I touch, therefore, on the excellences of his character, let it not be imagined that I mention them either as the ground of his own hope, or of

* Gal. ii. 20.

mine concerning him. No : it is to the honour of that *free grace*, on which he trusted, in which he gloried, which was his theme on earth, and is now his theme in heaven. His acknowledgment, like that of every believer of the gospel, was, “ By the grace of God I am what I am :” and to this grace he bore his dying testimony. Having at one time, on his death-bed, enumerated the blessings of salvation, amongst which he gave *sanctification*, restoration to the image of God, the principal place, he added—“ Thus salvation is of grace, free grace, from first to last ;—every part of it ; *all* grace—that’s the bible way of it.” He was at the same time characteristically jealous of every sentiment that bordered in the remotest manner on antinomianism, or had even a seeming tendency towards it, —any thing that appeared to loosen the connection between grace and godliness, between faith and holy practice : “ ‘ There is therefore now,’ ” said he, “ ‘ no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus :’ but we must never forget,” he added, “ the character of all such, ‘ who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit :’ this is the test of interest in Christ.”

With evangelical piety as the great principle of his character,—a piety which, founded in knowledge, rested not in speculation, but drew to God all the affections of his soul,—(for often was he wont to say, that religion without the affections was not religion at all ;—he could form no conception

of it ;—it was a contradiction in terms) ;—with this humble and heartfelt piety as the element, in which all the other parts of his character were steeped and imbued,—he was endeared to his friends and kindred by the singularly tender and unremitting exercise of all the domestic affections, which rendered him the centre of attraction and union to a wide circle of loved and loving relatives,—a circle, which he cheered by his natural buoyancy, vivacity, and playfulness of temper, and instructed by his edifying and enlivening converse. His religion did not quench the light of cheerfulness ; and his cheerfulness was at an equal remove from gloom and from levity. He retained his characteristic pleasantry even to the last.—He was esteemed by the church and people of Christ, as an aged pilgrim, who had long “walked with God,” and exemplified the power of godliness ; one who prayed for the peace of Jerusalem ; who delighted in unity ; who was “a lover of good men,” and who breathed from his very soul the prayer of the Apostle—“Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity !”—And he was respected and commended by the world at large for the exemplary consistency of his profession and conduct, which gave him a testimony in their consciences, such as they could not gainsay nor resist.—Both in public and private concerns, in the duties of the magistracy and the businesses of ordinary life ; he evinced a sound and enlightened judgment, in maturity of

investigation and rectitude of decision. He cultivated a taste for classical literature, which was more than a useless ornament: it was of essential benefit in the education of his family; and his acquaintance especially with the original language of the New Testament afforded him many an hour of rich and sacred pleasure. He was distinguished, in an uncommon degree, by the most unvarying temperate regularity of living; by scrupulous punctuality to all engagements; by the most unbending integrity; by a conscientious eagerness of desire to make every trust productive, under his management, of labour to himself and of benefit to others; by a union of kindly affability with dignified propriety of demeanour; by steadiness to old attachments, and a religious regard to the precept "thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake not;" by a benevolent liberality of heart, which hardly knew how to resist the petitions of charity and the claims of the cause of God, and which *to* his power, and *beyond* his power, was willing to answer both; and by a warm attachment to the government of his country. At times, indeed, on this subject, and occasionally too on some others, there was evinced a degree of impatient quickness of temper: but it was generally of such a kind, as to excite a smile at the good old man's zeal, rather than to stir in the bosom the slightest return of unpleasant feelings. "Whatever things were true, and just, and honourable, and pure, and lovely, and of good report,—these things

he thought of," and ever prayed for grace to practise.—Whatever his partial friends might think of him, he was himself of the "poor in spirit." His devotional exercises, characterised by correctness, simplicity, and tenderness, breathed the spirit of conscious unworthiness, and all the lowliness of a broken and contrite heart. When it was said to him, during his last illness, "You have long been walking with God, Sir," he replied, "I have long been a *professor* at least of the blessed name of Jesus;" and he shrunk with deep inward emotion from the thought of his own deficiencies.

There may seem a sacredness around the death-bed of a friend, that forbids publicity, and shuts it in from the intrusion of strangers. But I must draw the curtain a little aside. He was not ashamed of the gospel, either in life or in death. His living profession was public; and why should not his dying profession be public too? It ought to be known, that the truth to which he had adhered through life, sustained him in death. It ought to be known, that the God of his fathers, the God whom he knew and served and trusted from his youth, the God who had led him all his life long, did not forsake him at last.

His latter end was peace. Like that of Jacob it displayed *composure*, *affection*, and *faith*.

1. Sensible that his end was approaching, not a word escaped him, nor a symptom appeared, that indicated a fear of dying; nor amidst severe bodily

suffering, the slightest expression of murmuring or impatience. On the contrary, when, within a few hours of his departure, he repeated the words—"He who testifieth these things, saith, Surely I come quickly: Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!"—"that is," he added, "come quickly. But this must not be understood as the language of impatience,—come *instantly*,—come *now*, because it is *my* time. No, I would say, Come, Lord Jesus, come in thine own good time, in thine own way, and by thine own appointed means: for these are always best. *Even so* come, Lord Jesus!"—On the day before his death, when set up in bed for temporary ease, he all at once, to the delighted surprise of those of us who were by his bed-side, began to sing, with a soft and plaintive sweetness, in his circumstances irresistibly melting—

"Where high the heav'nly temple stands,
The house of God not made with hands,
A great High Priest our nature wears,
The guardian of mankind appears:"

and sung out the first four stanzas;—afterwards repeating, like one exhausted, the remaining two. My ear can never lose that sound;—my heart can never lose the sweetly solemn impression.—Such too was his collectedness, that he made particular inquiries about various individuals of his friends, and circumstances connected with them, such as we wondered he should think of;—wished every thing to go on in the usual way; and when it came

to the hour of evening family prayer, insisted on all being called in by the ordinary summons; when he sung a hymn, and heard a short portion of the word of God, and prayer offered up by his bedside.

2. I have mentioned the tenderness of his affections. They regarded both the living and the dead. He has left behind him a large circle of mourning relatives; and he had a numerous company too before him. These he was wont, in his musings on the heavenly world, and his anticipations of entering it, to delight himself in enumerating. Beside some of the dearest of them his precious dust has been laid; over more than one of whom *we* have formerly had occasion, as a church, to lift up the voice of mourning. These his affectionate and purified spirit has gone to join.—And his attachment to his surviving relatives retained, in his dying moments, all its living force and tenderness: “I was trying,” said he, “a little ago, to fall into a slumber; but instead of that,” he added, with a full heart and eye, and a voice tremulous with tender emotion—“my dear friends,—you and all the rest, came across my mind: I thought I was not long to be with you:—I had you all gathered together before me; and my heart went out to God in most sincere and earnest prayers for all and each of you, that the Lord might bless you all, and keep you from evil, and bring you to his heavenly kingdom!” O may the prayer of the dying saint be

heard for all his weeping kindred, that they may join him at last in the praises and the joys of the upper sanctuary!

3. His faith and hope were to the last unshaken. He "knew whom he had believed," and enjoyed the delightful "persuasion," that "he was able to keep that which he had committed to him against that day." His hope rested on the finished work of Jesus, and on the word of Him with whom it is "impossible to lie;" and he was enabled to hold it fast to the end. When the words of Christ were repeated to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness,"—and the remark was added,— "This is a sure and faithful word;"—"It is," said he, with much emphasis; "it is firmer than mountains of brass."—And still his confidence was chastened by lowly self-distrust, and accompanied with the fervent aspirations of the heart for the supplies of needed grace. He was delighted with the thought that God heard the breathings of the heart;—and at times these breathings gave themselves utterance in words:—"Fulfil in me, O Lord," he at one time suddenly broke out,— "Fulfil in me all the good pleasure of thy goodness, and the work of faith with power:" "Wash me, and sanctify me, and justify me, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God:" "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin:" "Create in me a clean heart, O

God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore," (or *confirm*, he added, for he himself had not lost them,) "Confirm unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me (by thy) free Spirit."

Such was the frame of his mind during the days of trouble that brought his earthly pilgrimage to a close:—and at length his parting soul winged its flight to the happy realms of purity and love, on the morning of that day, whose return he had so often hailed with such devotional delight, and which had so long been to him the foretaste of the sabbath of eternal rest!

The general subject of death I must leave to be taken up and practically improved at another opportunity.—In the meantime, from the views we have been setting before you,—let mourning relatives be comforted. Jesus says to you, "Weep not." Not that he forbids the tear of sorrow; for he shed it himself:

" The eye of Jesus wept,
It dropt a holy tear,
When Mary's brother slept,
A friend to Jesus dear:
Delightful thought! That blessed eye
Still beams with kindness in the sky."

But in the midst of your sorrow he gives you strong consolation: "I am the resurrection, and

the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live :” “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, That we who are alive (and) remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them who are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God ; and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then we who are alive, (and) remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”*

To his *aged* survivors let me say :—Cleave with purpose of heart to that God and Saviour who hath graciously said,—“I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee :” He who has been the guide of your youth, will be the support and consolation of your age. What he has been to those who have gone before you he will be also to you ; when heart and flesh fail, he will be “the strength of your heart and your portion for ever.”

And to you, dear *young* friends and relatives, over whom the good old father shed many a tear

* 1 Thess. iv. 15—18.

of melting tenderness, and for whom he breathed many a fervent prayer of faith and love at the mercy-seat of God, to you let me say—"Follow him." "Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever."

Let Christians in general be imitators of them "who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

And let others who may be saying as Balaam did, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" be affectionately entreated to "follow the faith" of the righteous;—to make *his* Saviour *their* Saviour, *his* God *their* God: and then "the end of their conversation" shall be like his. "They shall enter into peace—they shall rest in their beds; even every one who hath walked in his uprightness."

THE END.

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